

Dead Man's Hand

by TheDarkwriter7

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Summary: "Your Imperial majesty, my men and I will be able to dispose of your problem." The Emperor began to speak in protest but the assassin raised his hand. "Sir, you must remember..." The assassin's cold eyes stared into the emperor's. "I've killed powerful people before. Celtic generals, figures of influence, Roman traitors... why should a Viking 'Dragon conqueror' be any different?"

1. Prologue

****STORY DISCLAMIER â€" I do not own How to train your dragon, it is owned by Cressida Cowell and DreamWorks studios.****

_ (A/N â€" Hello there my fellow Fanfictioners! Before I start this, I would like to throw out some thanks yous to all of those who have reviewed my oneshot that I recently put up, 'Razor'. I've already got a couple of requests to act upon soon but until then, big thanks to **__**bookwurm247**_**, **__**HiccupHaddockLover**_**, **__**The Whisperer of Death**_**, **__**rewind73**_**, **__**ZefronsAngel**_** and my two good friends, **__**P-Artsypants **_** and **__**Ayame4679**_**! _ Seriously, thank you all _so much_ for the reviews and support, I really appreciate it!_

_ Now, if you have already read 'Razor', you will be aware of this fic because I mentioned it in the A/N at the start. I stand by what I said but will say again: this fic will be mainly be an Adventure/Romance, due to the main plot of the storyline and the romance of Hiccup/Astrid and maybe Fishlegs/Ruffnut on the side, along with some Snotlout/Heather if I can fit it in somewhere._

_ This fic will be set before the sequel, as I have yet to see it, but only barely: it will be set two months after the Defenders of Berk finale, 'Cast out'. This chapter is the prologue, so you guys will be able to accommodate yourselves with our story antagonists. Ok, let's

start this roller coaster!)_

* * *

><p>Dead man's hand " Prologue

Rome, Italy. A proud city... most definitely. Home to the greatest armies any ruler could wish for... going forth and conquering any lands that the ruler desired. Able to defeat any opposition that would dare stand against them. A great number of different humans, clans and tribes all over the lands had fallen to the Roman Empire over the centuries they had been there, for no one had managed to best the great Empire...

However, even the Romans had their boundaries.

And it is for this reason that Hermes Custis II (named after the messenger of the gods), the Emperor's royal and personal messenger, found himself walking along a dirty and possibly plague infested sewer, four Roman soldiers following his every step in order to protect him from any possible threat.

Being a messenger, Hermes would admit, was not the best job... but being the personal messenger for the Roman Emperor himself... that had some perks. His main article of clothing, a white short sleeve chilton, had been made with some of the finest wool and linen from across the Roman Empire, as had all the clothes of the Emperor's personal workers. His white toga that he wore over the chilton was made from the same materials and his sandals were made with the finest leather, perks that a normal messenger would not have. Finally, for protection, he had been gifted with a Roman soldier's armour vest to wear over his toga on trips to deliver important messages (after all, couldn't have one of the Emperor's personal servants dying now, could we?)

As he walked down the side of the sewer that run under Rome, his protective escorts trailing him, he couldn't help but feel for his current ruler. Up until now, the armies had always been the ones to do all the work. No Roman Emperor before the current had to even dare think of co-operating with unfamiliar forces... but now was a first time. The Emperor was scared, truly terrified, for what could happen if, as he spoke himself, true experts in that field were not the ones to deal and handle the situation.

Hermes and his guards eventually turned a corner of the sewer and found what they were looking for. Only a few more steps forward, guarded by many other Roman soldiers (one that Hermes happened to know), was the metal gate that blocked the only lawful entrance into a district of Rome that was abandoned twenty years ago due to mass flooding. Since then, it had been deemed uninhabitable...

However, that didn't seem to stop some people.

"Custis," the soldier that the brown haired messenger knew personally called. "Our Imperial Majesty's royal and personal messenger. To what do I owe this pleasure?" he ended sarcastically, a teasing grin on his lips.

"Do be so kind as to hold your tongue, Regent," Hermes replied mockingly. However, the air cleared very quickly when he stretched

out a hand. "However, I must say, it is good to see you again, my friend."

Regent shook the hand strongly as he met the pair of blue eyes. "Likewise, sir, likewise." He released the hand before placing it back onto the handle of his holstered sword. "But truly, to what do I owe this visit? It is not every day that the messenger of our _Imperial Majesty _comes along to a filthy sewer."

Suddenly, all of his happiness was gone and replaced with seriousness as an emotionless blank slate washed over Hermes' features. "I am under the orders of our Emperor to venture into the flooded district."

His friend's eyes widened, all humour leaving his face as well. "Truly? But what for? For what reason would you need to venture into the _flooded district_? After all, it _is _flooded; no Roman has lived in that part of the city for twenty years."

Hermes shook his head. "I cannot say, for his highness has ordered that only the person who I must find is to be told _why _he had to be found. However, I _can _tell you that it is to calm our ruler's mind."

"Calm his mind? What has got him so riled up?"

"Again, I cannot be explicit... but I can inform you that recently... we had new information come in from some of our spies... regarding a problem that we actually first heard of about a year ago. Sadly though, there has been a development in events over there and so... our Emperor believes something must be done." Hermes nodded to himself. "He has already decided what must be done."

"I understand, my friend," Regent replied with his own nod of understanding. He waved a hand to another gate guarding soldier. "Bring this Roman a rowing boat! He is to venture past the gate!" The soldier ran off immediately.

"Is it really that bad?" he continued. "I have heard the rumours of those who still remain past this gate but... I hoped it would not be true, for I have heard they are in no way merciless."

"The Emperor and I ourselves are not sure if they actually live... but he has said that there is no one better for the task if they are in fact real. Roman spies have provided me with a possible location of inhabitancy for the people I am to search for... and so my only hope is that they reveal themselves to me."

Before the soldier could say anything else, they found a one man rowing boat floating gently towards them along the dirty sewage water before it came to a stop just next to where the pair stood. Hermes turned around to face those who had escorted him.

"His Imperial Majesty has requested that I go this part of the journey on my own, as he believes that I going alone will show those I am to find that there is no threat. You may all return to your posts of work." The soldiers all nodded before turning away from the messenger, making their leave along the side of the sewer tunnel.

Regent gave his friend one more worried stare as the royal servant jumped into the boat. "Do you have any objections of going into the flooded district, my friend?"

Hermes sighed. "It is not like they would be acknowledged even if I did have them but... no; I do not have any objections. Our Emperor is truly terrified of what could happen, Regent; _truly terrified _of what could happen if this is not dealt with... and he has said that if anyone is to do it... he wants experienced people doing the job."

Regent sighed himself as he turned his head to look at the metal gate that had been emplaced twenty years ago. He turned back to stare at his friend and placed his right hand over his armour protected heart.

"I am with you Hermes; I pray to our gods that you return safely."

Said messenger nodded in reply, a smile of true gratitude on his face. "I thank you for your kind words, Regent. If I do return, we should gather for an informal meeting one day." The soldier chuckled.

"Yes, we should." He nodded one last time. "Goodbye, my friend."

Hermes nodded back. "Goodbye."

Regent waved to the two soldiers that stood by the cranking wheel, awaiting orders.

"Raise the gate!"

The two Romans began cranking the wheel with all the strength they had, the chain on the wheel winding up. Along with this, the metal gate ever so slowly lifted, its spiked points rising from the sewage water. Eventually, the gate had been raised a substantial amount from its original place and Hermes, now with a rowing oar set in his hands, pushed the boat forward. When he was past, he heard only three more words from Regent, followed by the rumbling of a chain before his mind set itself on his task.

"Lower the gate!"

* * *

><p>A full ninety minutes passed before Hermes eventually found the location he was looking for. The flooding of twenty years prior had left the Roman buildings uncared for, resulting in many of the buildings in the district now being scummy, slowly crumbling and even missing some parts of the walls and complete ceilings. There was enough water around the city for the messenger's boat to float at the height of about fifteen feet above the ground.<p>

Eventually though, with tired arms from constant rowing, Hermes found the location he had been ordered to find. It was the district's old armoury, the place where the main supplies for war such as swords, bows and arrows, shields and war machines were made for the people who had once lived in the now abandoned part of Rome. Unlike other

armouries, this one had been well known for having other aspects of activity instead of just metal making facilities. For example, Hermes had knowledge to believe that somewhere, in that building... stood a massive library, holding over two thousand books created by a vast variety of Romans.

The armoury was on a higher bit of land than most of the area, meaning that the Custis family member was forced to land his small boat to proceed. He came to the land's edge and then jumped off before removing his armour vest so as to remove his toga, tying one end to the boat and another to a nearby tree that had miraculously survived the flooding.

Pulling his armour back over his head, the Roman took several steps forward until he came to one side of the building, one with a front door over to the right end of the wall. He did not hesitate in trying the door, only to find it locked. He knocked loudly several times.

"Hello?" he called. "I am Hermes Custis II, royal and personal messenger of his Imperial Majesty! If anyone is present, you will allow me entry in the name of the Emperor!"

No answer met his ears. With a sigh, he backed up slightly so as to look up to the roof, hoping to find any signs of life. Of course, he found none.

A strange noise suddenly sounded behind him. It sounded like something rushing past a person, much too fast to even begin to comprehend what it was. Hermes turned around and screamed, his eyes enlarging in shock.

For there, a few steps in front of him... stood another human.

They wore a black overcoat for their first layer of clothing, one that reached down to their knees. Below that, Hermes could see, was a black cloak: one that appeared to stop at the person's waist but covered the rest of the body upwards. On the waist, Hermes could barely see, was a brown belt, probably made from leather, which had a large metal buckle on it and had a sword holster on the side. He wore brown leather boots with belt buckles on them, with pale yellow trousers on his lower half and to cover his hands, he wore a black pair of elbow length gloves: Hermes noticed that there was, what appeared to be, a smaller version of a crossbow attached to his left wrist. Finally, buckled to the face to cover his identity, was a black plague doctor's mask, the beak made out of metal. Hermes became notably more worried when he noticed the sword held to the person's waist.

Suddenly, another person, dressed exactly the same, appeared behind him with the noise sounding out again. Hermes screamed for the second time that day, the shock sending him forward so that he was between the two people.

"This is the one who is sometimes with the Emperor when he makes a public address," said one of them, a deep voice emitting from behind the mask.

"A not-so important royal Roman then," replied the other, his voice a little higher. He turned his attention to the messenger. "What brings

you here Roman?"

"I bring a message for your leader... if you are who I believe you are."

"A message?" said the one with the deeper voice. "A message for our leader? For what reason would the _Roman Emperor _wish to deliver a message to our leader, all the way out here in the flooded district?"

"I cannot tell you that," Hermes stated. "For I am forever loyal to his Imperial Majesty and so I respect all of his wishes... including his wish that only your leader sees the message I bare." For a few moments, neither of the men answered him. After a while though, they both drew their swords.

"What do you think of this?" the deep voiced one asked his partner. Before he replied, the other man moved forward and poked his sword into Hermes' back.

"Amateur trickery. He deserves to die for wasting our time." Suddenly, the deep voiced swordsmen disappeared, that sound emitting... only for him to reappear next to the other man. Before he could do anything, the lighter voiced man was pushed away from Hermes.

"That is not your choice to make, Leptus. You know that the fates of any possible intruders are always left up to Kaag." The man, apparently named Leptus, stood up straight in an attempt to intimidate the other man.

"What about Cassindra? Does she not get a say?"

"Cassindra is only ever in total command when Kaag is absent. Any other time, she is only second in command and so only gets a say. However, the ultimate fate of the person is always up to our master. You know that."

With a groan of frustration, 'Leptus' sheathed his sword, prompting the other man to do the same.

"Alright then messenger," he muttered bitterly. "You wish to meet Kaag? You can meet Kaag."

Hermes was unable to do anything before the two men took a hold of him, one shoulder each. They pushed him towards the door he had tried before, the deep voiced man taking a key out from one of the pockets of his overcoat. The door then opened, allowing the three to enter.

As the three walked through the now abandoned metal shops of the armoury, the royal messenger was celebrating his head. These are the people his Emperor had tasked him with looking for: the so called 'Plague doctors'. Called that for the bird masks they wore to conceal their identities, they were a group of assassins that were hired by people who so desperately wanted someone dead in Rome. Why were they so feared? It was no rumour that the group was connected to the forbidden art of using black magic to assist them with completing their assassinations.

As the trio exited the metal shops on the first floor and entered an empty hallway, another assassin suddenly appeared in front of them. This one was clothed differently though: for one, his overcoat was white instead of black. Another thing was that his gloves were not black either, for they were in fact brown, similarly to his belt and boots. The cloak was black but unlike the two assassins he had already met, Hermes noted that this assassin did not use the cloak to conceal the back of his head. He did though; still wear a plague doctor's mask.

Leptus and the other man did not waste time in releasing their intruder so that they could descend onto their knees, bowing to the one in white.

"My mistress," they both said at once. Ahh, if the leader was the one known as master Kaag, this must've been Cassindra, the second-in command.

"Rise assassins," she ordered to which the two men followed. "What do we have here?" she asked, crossing her arms.

"We found this Roman calling for us just outside," informed Leptus. "He claims to be here on an order from his _Imperial Majesty _to bring a message to master Kaag."

"Is that correct?" Cassindra asked. Knowing his place, Hermes did not respond, he simply looked down at the floor.

"Leptus, return to your guard post and Reflux, transverse up to the third floor, there are a group of novice trainees who require a session." At the order, both men vanished from the messenger's sides. The woman stepped forward, the bottom of her white overcoat moving in the slight gust of the building.

"I will take you to Kaag, Roman."

She placed a hand on his shoulder, that infernal noise sounded out _again _and then, Hermes found himself in, what appeared to be, a ransacked library. Many of the book shelves were overturned, the holders of literature sprayed out on the floor like rubbish. Many of the windows were smashed and when Hermes hung out slightly to take a look, he noticed that the inner sections of the building had not managed to escape the flood.

"Master."

At the simple word, the royal servant looked to where Cassindra stood... only to see another man beyond her, standing in the corner at a desk, his back to them.

"Yes Cassindra?"

"You have a visitor... a _messenger_, in fact."

The man turned around slowly, revealing himself in all his glory. Like all the assassins he led, he wore an overcoat except his one was a dark red shade and like his right hand woman, he wore brown gloves instead of black. His boots, trousers and belt were all the same but it had to be said that he, by far, had the biggest differences in appearance from all the other remaining inhabitants of the flooded

district.

He did not wear a black cloak beneath his overcoat. Instead, he wore a white tunic that stopped at his waist, tied at the top completely to ensure no skin was being shown and finally... he did not wear a plague doctor's mask. Without one, Hermes was able to take in the short brown hair on the white skinned man's head, his brown eyebrows, his black eyes that led to another realm and the creases in his skin, hinting at a possible old age.

"A messenger, you say?" the man questioned as he stepped towards the pair. "And the royal messenger, Hermes Custis II at that." Hermes tensed.

"How do you know my name?"

The assassin smirked. "I know a great deal, Roman." He paused to stretch out one of his gloved hands. "So... you have a message for me?"

With wary eyes on the old man, the Roman buried his hand into his chilton and seconds later, brought out a scroll of parchment, tied together with a tie of soft, red material. The man took it into his gloved hand before opening it forcefully.

As the assassin's eyes wandered all over the parchment, Hermes took the time to inspect Kaag's desk... or more, what was behind it. For there, on the wall behind the man's personal table, were pictures, drawings of numerous humans. Some, Hermes recognized as Romans: generals, traitors to the Empire... there was even a picture of past Emperor Romanos Diogenes IV with a cross through it. Other pictures were displayed also, drawings of people wearing, what Hermes believed to be anyway, Viking and Celtic war clothes.

Assassination targets, past and present.

"Cassindra, leave us," the man ordered after reading the message completely. "I must speak with Hermes privately."

The woman spoke one word, "master," before disappearing.

"Have you read this message of yours?" Kaag asked.

"No, his Imperial Majesty would not allow me to; he said it was only to be for your eyes... he did though tell me that it was regarding a big problem, and that he only wanted the best possible people to deal with it."

The man's face turned blank as he re-read one part of the message on the parchment. He looked back to Hermes afterwards.

"It says here that the Emperor would like to have a formal meeting with me in order to speak about the situation in further detail," he informed, pointing at the part of the message where it said exactly that. "I will come along to this meeting... on one condition."

Hermes shrugged. "What condition?"

"I may be a skilled swordsman with great experience in black magic,

but I am not simply going to walk into the building of the _Roman Emperor _without protection. If he wants this meeting to go ahead, you tell him that I wish to bring six of my fellow assassins with me as protection."

True to his word, the messenger did return to the Emperor with Kaag's say on the matter: he would come to the meeting, showing his agreement to possibly conduct the job if he was allowed to bring some of his fellow 'Roman villains' as protection.

Hermes was sent away again only minutes later to tell Kaag the Emperor would meet his condition.

* * *

><p>Two days later was the date of the meeting, the meeting that could decide Rome's salvation... or its possible destruction. His Imperial Majesty, the Roman Emperor, Alexios Komnenos I, sat in his grand chamber, his eight Praetorian bodyguards surrounding him. The grand chamber was massive, coloured completely red with the exception of the yellow path that led to his Imperial Majesty's meeting table. Torches lit up the entire room, hanging from the walls and as decoration, memorial statues of all previous Emperors stood at the walls.<p>

Despite his great protection though, Alexios could only quiver in fear. Not for his own safety... but for the outcome of this meeting.

Moments later, the doors of the grand chamber opened, revealing one Roman soldier.

"Your Imperial Majesty, the... assassin has arrived."

The Emperor did not hesitate in answering. "Send him in immediately."

The soldier bowed his head in respect before turning his head away. "He will see you now," Alexios heard him speak. Seconds later, the door opened wider, allowing the red overcoat clad man to walk through.

The room became incredibly tense as the man walked towards the Roman ruler. The praetorians stood up straight to conceal their fear, for they all knew what this man, despite his age, was capable of. The Emperor's outside persona did not change: he had to show this assassin that whilst it was the more powerful who was asking for help, he could have this man killed at any time. Could he though? With that black magic... there was no apparent limit to what this man could do.

Eventually, Kaag reached the Emperor's table and sat down.

"Assassin," Alexios began.

"Emperor," the assassin replied. One of the Praetorians stepped forward angrily.

"You will refer to Emperor Alexios as his Imperial Majesty!" he

shouted. The Emperor raised his right hand in protest.

"Calm yourself, Campbell. The assassin can refer to me as he pleases. After all... he is not a Roman." The Praetorian Guard backed away back into his protective position. Alexios turned his head to search his grand chamber. "Where is the protection you desired to bring alongside you?"

"They are around," Kaag replied emotionlessly. "They will appear if I require them." The Emperor nodded slowly, processing this information; best not to danger the swordsman then.

"If you do not mind me asking, assassin, where did you find those fine articles of clothing?" he asked. "I have not seen that type before but it looks quite exquisite." Kaag looked down at his appearance before replying.

"As you said yourself, I am not a Roman. My men and I have our own personal tailor, one who is experienced in the art of thievery so that he is able to gain the greatest materials for our clothing." The man proceeded to rest his elbows on the table, intertwining his fingers whilst those black eyes stared into the Roman's very soul. "But we are not here to talk about clothing now, are we Emperor?"

Alexios nodded, holding out his left hand to a Praetorian. The guard placed a scroll into his ruler's hand only for his Imperial Majesty to throw it across the table to the assassin. Kaag, pulling his hands apart, took the scroll into his grip and opened it up.

On the parchment was a picture, a drawing, of the target.

"In your message from Hermes, you greatly stressed that the fate of this person was of great importance to the Roman Empire. Why?" Kaag queried.

"Recently, Roman spies returned home with dreadful news of activity over at the British isles," Alexios informed with a heavy heart. "There has been a development in activities over there in the last few months, developments that do not ease my being one. Little. Bit."

"Care to tell me the full story?"

"Over the last few months, the people I was concerned with were involved in a small war with previous members of their own community. Recently though, the information that has been brought back tells me that the conflict is no longer going on so... the chances of the concern dying over there have narrowed explicitly."

"And it is for this reason that you want my men and I to deal with them ourselves? Why is this so important?" The Emperor sighed.

"The concern, he... about a month ago, he did something I believed no person could _ever _do, something I until recently believed to be _impossible_."

"What did he do?"

The Emperor forced his own eyes to meet Kaag's. "The Viking scum

trained a _dragon_."

The assassin's eyes widened slightly. Now that... _that _was a surprise. Even Kaag, someone who had never been to the British Isles, was aware that the Vikings over there had been in a three hundred year war with the flying beasts. But one Viking had managed to actually _train_ one?

"I think I am beginning to see where this is going," Kaag said.

"The cause of concern managed to change the ways of his fellow Vikings, they now _live _with the dragons on their island, the island called Berk. If that Viking was to spread his beliefs, get others to befriend dragons... they could revolt against Roman reign. He could be the reason for the destruction of the Roman Empire that my past Emperors and I have worked _so hard _to create."

Ahh... there we go. Alexios wanted the concern eliminated because he believed that if it was left unattended too long, the Viking could use the dragons to destroy the Roman Empire. A logical reason to worry, Kaag guessed.

"Your Imperial majesty, my men and I will be able to dispose of your problem." The Emperor began to speak in protest but the assassin raised his hand. "Sir, you must remember..." The assassin's cold eyes stared into the emperor's. "I've killed powerful people before. Celtic generals, figures of influence, Roman traitors... why should a Viking 'Dragon conqueror' be any different?"

The Emperor smiled in relief. "So you'll take the job?" he asked, hope hidden in his voice.

"Yes, the Plague doctors accept your proposition. What is the bounty that we shall receive for the assassination of this target?"

"For one, I will make it a crime punishable by death to hunt out your group of assassins, for your group is, you are quite aware, not the most likable group of people." Kaag nodded in agreement. "Secondly, I will pay you 30,000 coins for the assassination of that... nuisance who has dared become a thorn in my side."

Kaag's eyes widened slightly. "30,000 coins? That is the highest bounty my group have been offered since the great Doukid job of 1071." He suddenly smirked. "Though, of course, you Romans would know all about that."

Alexios then smirked, something the assassin was honestly not expecting.

"I honestly do not care that it was your group that assassinated Romanos Diogenes IV, I despised the way he ruled over my people and so had no respect for him." The smirk quickly became a sincere smile. "Before you leave to attend to the job, Kaag, there is something I have for you."

He moved his left hand in a 'come forth' motion to one of his Praetorian Guards. The soldier then took steps towards Kaag, who had his eyebrow raised in question. The Roman, upon reaching the older man's side of the table, revealed a sheathed sword, laying it on the table. Kaag unsheathed it, taking the blade into his hand.

It was an extremely light blade, almost like a feather. The handle was patterned metal, formulating a gold-bronze pattern all the way up the handle. The metal itself was very shiny and seemed to glow in the light.

"I thank you for this gift, your majesty, truly I do," the assassin began, his sincerity shown through his use of the ruler's proper title. "But this blade would of no use to me: it is far too light to use."

"That is what I first believed when I held that sword, Kaag," Alexios countered. "But trust me on this, for I have seen it: that sword will cut through any other metal like a normal blade would cut through flesh." The older man did not need to speak his question; it was all over his face. "The metal comes from a special kind of lava that is regurgitated by the Gronkle dragon species." He smirked. "The Vikings are not the only ones who have encountered the winged demons."

"I thank you for the gift, your highness," Kaag thanked before standing from his chair. "I am going to make my leave now; I have a job to prepare."

As the brown haired man walked back to the grand chamber's doors, the Emperor called to him. "Are you sure you will not require assistance?"

Before opening the door to leave, Kaag looked over his shoulder, a truly dark expression on his face.

"Emperor Alexios, you could float one of your greatest ships on the amount of blood I've spilled."

And with that, he walked from the hall, the door closing behind him.

The old man used his black magic to rapidly appear in his home, the abandoned library. He took a few steps forward to be next to his desk, the wall of assassination targets behind him. He reached down slightly and grasped hold of one of the drawer handles before pulling it open. Inside was only one current item of interest: an old, but still in good condition, brown journal, held closed with a small metal buckle.

Kaag released the buckle, allowing him to turn the pages of the journal. Coming to the most recent page, almost full, he read the list of words.

*Names of all targets are given by the employer, once asked for a full ID of the target*

Cronsontvious, former general of the Roman armies â€" bounty of 1,500 coins offered. Target assassinated, bounty received.

Drago Bludvist, capturer of various dragon species â€" bounty of 10,000 coins offered. Location of target unknown.

_Romanos Diogenes IV, current Roman Emperor at time â€" bounty of 40,000 coins offered. Target neutralised, employer informed, original bounty received + 10,000 coins extra for neutralisation

method._

Oswald the Agreeable, chief of the Berserker Viking tribe â€" bounty of 6,000 coins offered. Target assassinated, payment refused, location of employer unknown.

Sollard, former Roman soldier, traitor to the Empire â€" bounty of 5,000 coins offered. Target assassinated, bounty received.

_Lady Prancellia, daughter of descendent of Celtic ruler __Lysimachus â€" bounty of 10,000 coins offered. Target abducted and delivered, bounty received._

Unnamed masked felon â€" bounty of 8,000 coins offered. Revealed to be Molligan.

The one known only as 'Kalerned' â€" bounty of 2,500 coins offered. Location of target unknown.

Molligan, killer of Roman Empress Irene Doukaina â€" bounty of 25,000 coins offered. Target abducted and delivered to Roman soldiers, bounties of both Molligan and the 'Unnamed masked felon' received.

Taking a bird's feather from his drawer, Kaag dipped it into the pot of ink that sat on his desk. He added the name of Emperor Alexios' target, writing the name given and the bounty offered.

Now, under the entry of Molligan, the journal wrote...

_Hiccup Horrendous Haddock __III__, Viking dragon trainer â€" bounty of 30,000 coins offered._

* * *

><p>(AN â€" There we go, the prologue is finished! Did that get all of you hyped up for the rest of my upcoming fic? I sure hope so! Please show some love and support and leave a review for me, just so I know how much you guys really care! _

I send out a MASSIVE thanks to my friend **P-Artsypants **for being my beta reader on this, thank you all so much, hope you enjoyed, see ya next time!)

2. One last gift

(A/N â€" Hello everybody! Sorry about this late update, I've been on holiday for the past week so have been unable to work on this.

_Thank you so much for the initial praise on this story, I really appreciate it. I would like to send out a really big thank you to my first seven reviewers, whose comments have really given me great cause to continue this â€" __**umdiddle**__, __**Malik The Night Angel**__, __**Iron-Mantis**__, __**Lala2010**__, that one guest, my friend __**Ayame4679**__ and my Beta reader, __**P-Artsypants**__._

_Also, before we start, I would like to clear something up for

reviewer __**umdididdle **__and anyone else who was confused as to when this story is set. When I first started this, I had yet to see the sequel but I happily saw it just before going on holiday (best... film... EVER!). Despite this though, the story is still going to be set in the place where I originally planned it. So, just to clear things up, the story, as of this chapter, is happening two months after the season finale of 'Defenders of Berk', the episode 'Cast out' in which Alvin works together with Hiccup to defeat Dagur the Deranged and the Screaming Death._

_I hope that has cleared everything up. Finally, before we begin, I just want to put a warning out that in the second half of this chapter, there will be some writing that will put a gory image into your heads. I will put a warning in just before then so that those who want to avoid the gory scene can. If you are okay with it, read on but for those who are not, just move on until you see the other words in bold. _

Ok, that's about it guys - enjoy!

* * *

><p>Dead Man's Hand chapter 1 â€" One last gift

One more job shouldn't have mattered...

After all, I've killed powerful people before... and as I told Emperor Alexios, you could float one of the greatest Roman ships on the amount of blood I've spilled. In the way I work, it's really simple: you kill for a man, that man is killed... and then another employer will step in to fill the last one. It's a vicious cycle, one made up of people who are... all equally corrupt... but it's understandable.

Why should a teenage Viking be different?

* * *

><p>One month later...

The island of Berk... twelve days north of hopeless and a few degrees south of freezing to death. The village, in one word, sturdy; it had been set upon the island for a good seven generations and up until about three months ago, every house had been new. It had great water for fishing, fabulous forestry for hunting and a charming view of the sunsets.

Oh, and don't forget the amazing pets that had moved in recently.

Yes, it was the only way a certain Viking had ever described his home and it was the only way he ever planned to from now on. On this unusually clear and sunny day on Berk, the Vikings of the island were all up and at it for a fresh day, their mildly new dragon companions awake with them as the sun only barely shone over the horizon. At the start of this day, we find ourselves in the house of the village chief, Stoick the Vast, which was currently only occupied by two certain village residents, both still sleeping.

One was the future heir and, probably, the most important Viking of

the village, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III. Before three months ago, Hiccup had been only the village screw-up, the village nonsense, the black sheep who always caused more trouble than he was worth. However, on one faithful night, he had shot down the dragon that would soon change everything about the village and the many dragon species that raided it constantly.

Following a sequence of events, Hiccup and his new friend, the Night fury that he had shot down named Toothless, came into a conflict with the dragon queen known as the Red Death. They had fought viscously, using everything the two flying creatures had had at their disposal. Eventually, the Viking and his friend had won, killing the beast... but not without Hiccup losing his left leg.

Thankfully, he had lived and a few days later, he had awakened from the comatose state the battle had left him in to find Vikings... and dragons... together, in peace and from then on, Hiccup had been designated a hero to his people.

Although, it could be said that the dragons were not the only problem the people of Berk faced. One Viking, a grouchy man known as Mildew, had plotted many times to get rid of the dragons that roamed Berk, even going as far as to strike a deal with Alvin the Treacherous, the leader of the Outcast tribe from Outcast Island. Dagur the Deranged of the Berserker tribe had also found himself in the mix; wanting Toothless' head on his wall. A giant albino Whispering Death dragon, known as the _Screaming _Death, had _also _paid the people of Berk many visits after being made part of a plan to destroy the village.

In the end though, it was all thanks to Hiccup that all these problems were dealt with. He managed to somehow change Mildew's mind about the flying fire breathers, Dagur the Deranged was currently (as far as Stoick and Hiccup were aware) being held prisoner on Outcast Island for his treachery against Alvin during a search for a Skrill, the Screaming Death had been reunited with its mother and so was no longer a problem and best of all, Alvin and Stoick had become allies again, the Outcast leader having signed a peace treaty just a month ago.

The other resident of the house was, of course, Toothless, the Night fury of the village and Hiccup's best friend. Despite being shot down by the Viking, after the formation of the bond they now had, Toothless had been by Hiccup's side every step of the way. He had defended his human from the Monstrous Nightmare in the arena, had saved him from an otherwise deadly fate against the Red Death, had given up his vendetta against his Whispering Death rival to save his hatchling, had been by Hiccup's side against Dagur the Deranged and had aided him in protecting his father's village from the Screaming Death. Yes, there was no doubt about it, Toothless was Hiccup's best friend and always would be.

Still, even Hiccup had to admit, the Night fury holding him to his dragon belly with his claws, black wings wrapped around the pair... that was a bit too much.

It was at this moment that Hiccup awoke from his slumber. Eyes opening tiredly and yawning, he instinctively moved to stretch his limbs but found that he was unable to move any parts of his body. He rolled his eyes as he realised his current predicament. On the day of

the peace treaty signing between the Hairy Hooligans and the Outcasts, Toothless, with those big pleading eyes, had desired for Hiccup to sleep in his dragon arms so that the Night fury could keep his human safe, just in case the Outcasts took the new relationship of the tribes to an advantage and so Hiccup had allowed the dragon to hold him that night so as to put his friend's fears at ease. However, every night afterwards in the past month, when Hiccup would go to sleep in his bed, he would awake within the cocoon of his black scaled friend.

"Toothless," Hiccup said with frustration from his position, causing said winged creature to open its green eyes slowly. "You have to stop this. It's been a whole month bud, I don't think the Outcasts are gonna be attacking us anytime soon."

His response was Toothless crooning lovingly as he rubbed his head against his human's, his eyes closing slowly.

Hiccup sighed... but the smile was there. "Can you let me up please? I need to stretch myself before my muscles cramp up."

Following his friend's request, the dragon released his hug on the boy, allowing him to roll out onto the floor. He stretched his limbs, his smile turning satisfied as almost inaudible pops could be heard from his bones. The boy then proceeded to sit up, his hands holding him up as he leaned on them. He turned to his friend.

"Bud, could you do me a favour and get me my prosthetic?" Hiccup pleaded. Honestly, the boy need no longer ask for the dragon to do this deed. Ever since the beast had taken to holding his human like similarly to how Astrid held that stuffed dragon at night (she had threatened to end the lives of both Viking and Night fury alike if anyone found out), the creature practically followed him everywhere and helped him as much as he could, just to be sure in regards to safety. Hiccup had protested greatly to these new actions of mothering care, stating that it was not required and of course, Toothless' reply had been to blow hot air in the boy's face, as if to say 'I don't really care.'

His winged friend followed his request quickly and in seconds, Hiccup had attached the prosthetic to his leg. He stood up, the dragon using his head for his hatchling to support himself.

"Thanks bud," the Viking responded with a smile, prompting a gummy smile from the Night fury.

The pair left the room and walked down the stairs of the house. Just as Hiccup's metal foot touched the bottom of the home's ground floor, the door opened and the current chief entered in all his glory.

"Ah, Hiccup," he began with his own grin. "Finally decided to face the day then, have you?"

The future chief rolled his eyes. "Yes dad, I'm awake." He turned his head to Toothless and gave him a deadpan expression (which only brought another gummy smile from the dragon) before addressing his father again. "I swear dad, if I didn't know any better, I would say that Toothless is preparing himself to be a mother." Stoick chuckled and turned his own head to look at the Night fury.

"Yes, you haven't managed to accept that this peace treaty is a true thing yet, have you, you stubborn reptile?" Toothless turned his head away sternly from the chief, causing the same words to be thought of by both Vikings.

'_I know what I'm doing'_.

Stoick chuckled again. "I'm sure you do," he finished with a tip of his helmet to the creature. He walked over the room so as to sit at the head of the room's dining table and then turned his attention back to his son. "So, what's the plan today?" Hiccup shrugged his skinny shoulders.

"Ah, same old, same old. I'll probably see Astrid for a bit, go for a flight with Toothless, I'll have to run today's dragon training lesson afterwards and then I'll probably go and see if Gobber wants any help in the forge."

"Oh... good, good." An uncomfortable silence suddenly filled the room, Hiccup rocking on his hips and Stoick's eyes searching the room. The older man cleared his throat before continuing. "Erm... what's the current situation with you and that lass?"

Hiccup's cheeks reddened slightly. "Er... I'm not sure exactly. We have... _something_... and I'm pretty sure she likes me... but right now, I would just say that we are... really good friends." His momentary embarrassment disappeared as an eyebrow rose in question. "Why do you ask?"

Stoick shook his head slightly. "Oh, no reason... no reason." Hiccup shrugged his shoulders before taking steps over to the room's dining table, where a flask of water sat. He took the flask into his right hand and brought it to his mouth, drinking down gulps.

Stoick's facade suddenly evaporated as his eyes hardened. "You know what, Hiccup? I'm just gonna come out with it. When am I going to get grandbabies?"

The young Viking instantly began choking on the clear liquid in his throat, his eyes bulging and his left hand grasping at his neck. Toothless wrapped his tail around his friend's mid-section and squeezed with everything he had. It took a few attempts, Hiccup coughing up a storm all the way, but eventually, the trapped water came loose. Hiccup then turned his wide eyes to his father.

"Whhhhhhyyyy!?" he screamed.

Stoick shrugged. "You looked all right to me." He flexed his arm muscles. "You're a _Viking_, full of strength and muscle..." he paused to cast a glance at the Nightfury of the village. "And I knew he would help you if you needed it."

Hiccup sighed in frustration. "Err... going back to your _original question _dad... I can honestly say if you had any plans for a grandbaby anytime soon... you should save them for a while." Stoick, despite who he was, sighed in a disappointment.

"Oh," he muttered. "Is it because you two aren't married yet? The Hoffersons have _really _been saying lately about how you have really

come around in their vision. In fact, they said that you were the only one that they wanted to marry Astrid." His eyebrows creased as he looked to the corner of his eye. "Although I think Mr. Hofferson said something about him wanting you to be able to defend yourself."

_This _time, it was Hiccup's eyebrows that creased in thought. "What do you mean 'defend myself'? I am a perfectly capable fighter."

"When you're riding Toothless. Any other time... not so much."

"Has he _seen _my Gronkle iron shield with in-built crossbow?" Stoick's mouth opened for him to reply, but he held himself.

"Actually, you know what? No, I don't think he has. You better show that off to him later, son." Hiccup sighed again as he made his way to the front door, his dragon trailing him.

"Dad, I don't think I'm gonna be showing my personal weapon off to Astrid's father anytime soon. Besides, I'm too young to be getting married; I'm not even sixteen yet!" Stoick looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

"I was fourteen years old when I began courting your mother," he offhandedly informed. Hiccup sighed again; he just couldn't win with this man!

"That doesn't mean anything! Like I said dad, me and Astrid aren't even officially courting yet! Right now, we are just really good friends. I mean yeah, she probably hangs out with me a lot more than any of the others... and she sometimes likes to hold me when she rides with me and Toothless..." Stoick was happy to notice the smile appearing on Hiccup's lips. "And she... sometimes gives me hugs... or the occasional kiss on the cheek..." His eyes began to close, as if he beginning to enter a blissful dream. "Or... on the..." His eyelids ripped themselves open when he realised what he was saying. A dark shade of red crossed his face, earning a chuckle from his father.

"Well, you must be _really _good friends then, Hiccup."

Said teenager groaned. "Gah, _fine_, I get your point. I'm just saying that despite all this, Astrid and I aren't official yet so you can't be expecting grandkids."

"Do you _hope _to marry her one day?"

The boy paused himself as the thought ran through his mind. Seconds later, he rubbed his arm, nervousness taking him over. "...If she would have me."

Stoick laughed. "Oh, come on Hiccup! The lass is practically begging for you to ask!" The man noticed that at these words, his son's attitude did not improve. A small smile came over his face as he stood. He made his way to his son and laid a hand on a bony shoulder, causing the younger one to raise his head. "I'm just saying Hiccup, you and her _really _have something going on and if I were you, I would make it official before another tribe comes along and asks for

her hand... but if it makes you feel any better, I'll let you do this in your own time; I won't arrange a marriage behind your back or anything." Hiccup smiled in gratitude.

"Thanks dad." The older man squeezed the boy's shoulder.

Stoick released him, allowing the brunette to finally leave his house to begin his day. Just as he and Toothless were halfway down the hill, he was halted by one word from his father's voice.

"If..."

Hiccup groaned for the umpteenth time that day, turning around to see his smirking father standing in the house's doorway. "What?"

"You ask Astrid to be your official girlfriend some point this week."

"If I do, will you forget this whole conversation ever happened?"

"Maybe."

"Fine, I'll ask her at some point." And with those final words, the boy was away, his faithful dragon following as Stoick closed the door with a heartfelt chuckle.

Hiccup made it probably about a few feet down the hill his house stood on before he heard the familiar dragon cry of a Deadly Nadder. Raising his head, he caught sight of the dragon Stormfly and her faithful rider who Hiccup and his father had just been talking about. The creature landed only a few feet away from the boy and the Night fury just as a certain blonde jumped onto the ground. The young male bowed mockingly.

"Well, hello there, lady Hofferson," he said, prompting her to roll her eyes and smirk. "How are you on this fine, sunny day?"

"I was alright until you had to go and mock me, so thanks for ruining my day," Astrid replied knowingly as she walked towards him, her arms crossed.

"I haven't ruined your day, the sun just rose."

Astrid scoffed. "You would say that, having just risen from your pit. You and that dragon have been sleeping in _way _too much lately."

Hiccup gasped, placing a hand over his heart. "My _Pit!?" he turned his head to look at Toothless. "Did you hear that, bud? Astrid just called your loving, hugging arms a _pit!_" The dragon growled at the girl, but there was playfulness in his eyes. Hiccup shrugged his shoulders. "Well, we can't be having someone talking about our resident Night fury like that now, can we bud?"

Before she could make a move to run away, Toothless pounced at the human female, pinning her to the ground as she emitted a scream. The dragon began licking her face ferociously, not paying attention to her screams and orders for him to stop.

"Toothless, stop!" Astrid ordered, her hands attempting to push the creature's head. However, the licking only intensified. With a sigh, she gave up, her hands and head falling back into the grass.

About a minute later, satisfied with the 'face wash' he had given his friend's 'mate', Toothless drew back to sit down on his hind legs next to his master as Astrid sat up. Toothless had licked her face so much; her fringe and bangs were actually standing up from the so much slobber being within the strands of hair. Hiccup laughed, earning a glare from the girl.

"You think this is _funny!? _I just had my weekly bath!" Hiccup snorted.

"Weekly, please; I bath three times a week." And with that comment, the boy promptly found his fur vest in the tight fist grip of Astrid Hofferson with her face only millimetres from his own.

"Are you seriously having a say at my hygiene?" It wasn't the implied threat itself that scared him, it was the way she said it. Hiccup's eyes widened in fear and his famous stutter came into effect.

"Err...err... no?"

Astrid only glared with more strength. "Was that a question? Or an answer?"

"An... answer?"

Astrid released Hiccup from her grip, causing him to drop flat out onto the ground. He made the move to get up but before he could make the move to get onto his feet, he found a certain Hofferson's boot clad foot pressing into his bony chest, forcing him to lie down in the dirt whilst a hand lay on her hip. Hiccup sighed; he knew the routine by now.

"I'm sorry."

Astrid smirked. "What for, big baby boo?"

One of the boy's eyebrows rose in amazement. That was a new one. Nevertheless, he continued his forced apology. "For laughing at your hair." He felt her foot press down on him more. "And mocking that you only bath once a week." More pressure, enough to hurt. "And for sicking Toothless on you!"

The girl nodded. "Good," she said as she removed her foot from her friend's body and held out a hand. The boy took it gratefully and was quickly on his feet again. As he brushed the dirt from his clothes, Astrid gave him a punch to the arm.

"Ow, was your foot on my chest not enough for you?" he snarked.

The blonde only smirked again as she placed a hand on her hip. "That's for everything that just happened."

Hiccup's eyes came up slightly from looking at the ground, hopeful. "And... where's everything else?" he asked.

Astrid scoffed; he had become _expectant _of the kisses her lips gave him. "Nope, you pushed me too far this time. No kiss for you." With that, she proceeded to walk down the hill, Stormfly following her and her braided hair thrown over her shoulder.

"What?!" The Haddock boy ran after her, Toothless following him. "No kiss? You can't do that!"

"Err, I think I can," she replied with a teasing grin. "They are _my _lips and _I _will choose where they go."

"No, I mean you punched me _and _you used your foot to hold me on the ground! There has to be kiss involved, it makes up for the pain!"

Astrid stopped in her tracks, turning around so as to poke a finger into the boy's already bruised chest. "Oh, you don't _deserve _my lips right now, mister! _Especially _considering you were meant to be my backup earlier and then... oh right, didn't show up."

Hiccup's eyebrows furrowed. "Backup? Backup for wh-Oh." Suddenly, a smirk was on his lips. "How was your visit to Mildew and Toxic then?"

Astrid growled but as with Toothless before, the playfulness was there. "Don't you dare start! You were supposed to be there to take the force of him away from me!"

Following the Screaming Death being reunited with its mother, Mildew had been welcomed back onto the island of Berk, Stoick and Hiccup thanking him for the role he played in setting Toothless free during Alvin's surprise attack against Dagur the Deranged. Well... 'welcomed back' probably isn't the best way to describe it, as Stoick, Hiccup and Gobber were the only humans who actually believed he _deserved _to be back on the island. Many other Vikings had tried to see Mildew kicked off the island again but luckily... he had his new friend to keep him safe.

Ah yes, Mildew's new friend... the source of all the dragon rider's jokes.

Upon returning to his home on the other side of the village, Mildew had been very unhappy to discover a Deadly Nadder sitting on his rooftop, curled up and asleep. Outraged, he had called for Hiccup to get rid of the dragon and it was only _then _did Hiccup recognise the winged beast.

"Mildew, isn't this the same Deadly Nadder I helped you train on Outcast Island?"

Yes, it was the same Deadly Nadder. It turned out that the creature had decided to stay put but... being actually _trained _by Mildew, the creature saw him as its master. This didn't go well with the Viking at first and so he decided to have nothing to do with it, ignoring it completely whenever it followed him anywhere. However, after he had discovered what a good guard Toxic could be (named after her poisonous tail spikes); Mildew had learnt to appreciate the creature and so became actually quite close with it. In no time, the Nadder loved her master to bits and Mildew treated his dragon like

how he treated his sheep, fungus. The reason for Astrid having to visit Mildew earlier was because she, along with the village healer, had to simply go and give Toxic a check-up; Astrid had to go because she was the 'Nadder expert' of the dragon academy.

And the whole time, Mildew wouldn't stop being worried.

"No Astrid, seriously, I am sorry," Hiccup apologised. "Next time you need me up for anything in the morning, I will be there."

The girl crossed her arms. "Will you though? Or will you just be wrapped up in your Night fury's limbs again?"

Toothless gave a low rumble from his mouth to attract her attention and then looked at her with protective eyes. _I was protecting my hatchling_, they seemed to say.

"Okay, enough of this!" Hiccup shouted with a grin. "Are we going for a morning flight or not? Because if you remember, I have a lesson to teach later on at the academy." Astrid smirked as Stormfly came right up next to her, the word 'flight' attracting her to her rider. The girl climbed aboard her companion as Hiccup climbed into Toothless' saddle.

"Race you to the cove?" she challenged.

"Oh, you are on." Their eyes met.

"3..."

"2..."

"1..."

"GO!" Astrid screamed as she bolted into the sky. Hiccup waited behind for a moment, gazing at the speeding girl with dreamy eyes.

"Dad's right," he spoke to his friend. "I am gonna marry her one day." He tapped the dragon's side. "Alright. Let's go get em, bud."

And with that, they were in the air as well.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile..._

It appeared that the great Roman Emperor Alexios was serious about disposing of this boy as soon as possible for he had, against his personal advisor's judgement, allowed the Plague Doctor assassins to borrow one of the Roman navy's ships. The ship, known as a trireme, was in no way unique despite being used for a unique task. It was your average Roman trireme: had a length of 120 feet, a mast that supported a single but large rectangular sail, two very long oars that did the steering and a few smaller oars to help with speed. On the sail of the ship was the symbol of the Roman army â€" two golden swords crossed over each other, with the letters 'S.P.Q.R' over the image and a design of an emperor's Civic Crown just underneath.

Above the deck, on the journey towards the island of the assassination target, the actual assassins had stood, going about their daily business by preparing for the job ahead of them. Below the deck had been 125 rowers, all ordered by Alexios himself to help take the ship and its occupants to its destination (again, another sign of the Emperor's desire to have the target eliminated). They had done their job well, getting the assassins from Rome to the desired destination in just over a month.

It was the 31st day of the assassins being on the sea and right now, the leader of the Plague Doctors sat within his confined space of the ship, the so called 'high castle' near the back of the ship at the stern. In the small room, he sat at a table on a simple chair. The man was silent and unmoving, the sounds of ship oars hitting the sea barely reaching his ears. To put it mildly, Kaag was distracted.

On the small table lay a personal possession of his, something he received from someone quite special a long time ago. It didn't seem anything fancy, it was a simple black crystal held on a simple metal chain small enough to fit around someone's wrist (however, Kaag preferred to carry it in the pocket of his red overcoat). However, this crystal was anything but simple. This was what he used to signal the assassin that he wanted to talk and was what he used to keep an eye on him. When he wanted to speak with Kaag, the crystal would emit a small whispering sound, similar to a young girl whispering gibberish in your ear and the crystal would suddenly start flashing red, albeit in a slow rhythm.

Right now, it was doing both of those things.

It had been whispering and flashing for just under an hour now, it was clear that he wanted to have a little chat. However, Kaag was halted from immediately entering into his realm by his own thoughts. The present year was 1105, and he had only contacted Kaag once, the time after the assassin had made a name for himself by killing Emperor Romanos Diogenes IV in 1071, at the age of sixteen. That was 34 years ago, why did he suddenly want to talk now?

Despite these thoughts, Kaag found his right hand moving forward toward the stone. However, before he could take the rock into his grasp, he felt another presence in the room. He raised his head to see his right-hand woman standing in the room's doorway, her arms crossed.

"Kaag," she started. "One of the assassins saw something in the distance. You may want to see this."

The woman walked from the room, her master following her quickly onto the boat's top deck. There were no actual Romans on this part of the ship, they were all below, on orders from their emperor to row the boat and row the boat only, no talking to the assassins ('let them do what I am paying them to do', he said). Cassindra had stopped walking and had crossed her arms again as she stared at something in the distance. Kaag crossed his own pair of limbs upon realising why the ship had slowed down to a stop in the last few seconds.

"Another island." His second-in-command nodded.

"Yes sir. Outcast Island, I believe, home to the recently new allies

of the Hairy Hooligans." She turned her head to look at her master. "I was thinking it would be a good place to reside whilst we were on this mission... but of course, the final word comes down to you."

One of the corners of Kaag's mouth rose barely. "I think so too. Good choice, Cassindra. What are we waiting for then?"

"Just one thing, sir." She shrugged her shoulders. "Honestly? I got bored so I started without you; I sent Thomas on a quick scouting run to get a general idea of where the main Viking guards of the island are. When we are aware of their positions, we will be able to formulate an attack to take them all out, quickly and before anyone knows what is happening."

The unmistakable sound of a black magic teleport sounded behind Kaag as Cassindra finished her sentence. The leading pair of assassins both turned around at the sound to see one of their average assassins. Thomas.

"Cassindra, gather up four other assassins and prepare for the attack." Kaag ordered. The woman replied with a quick 'yes sir' before walking away and opening her mouth to bark her own commands. The old man set his sights on Thomas. "Give me a report."

"Okay, as far as I can tell, there are five points of the island where the Outcast numbers are at their highest. One each on the four corners of the island and then the last in the centre, where the group leader is believed to be. They aren't armed too well, nothing we can't handle: just a few swords, shields, other hand held weapons and crossbows." The assassin suddenly lowered his head, shameful. "Sorry sir, best I could do."

"Good enough. Go find Cassindra and prepare, I want you to be part of the assault that will take that island." Thomas bowed to his leader before running off in pursuit of the female in the white overcoat.

Briefly alone, Kaag took small steps forward so as to be right next to the side of the ship and crossed his arms over the banister, his gloved hands hanging over the edge. What the group was about to do, any other man would say, was completely unnecessary. The Plague Doctors could easily just continue their journey to Berk, set up a small camp on the island and complete the mission from there. However, in Kaag's view, there was nothing wrong with this new attribute to the plan. This tribe of Outcasts were Vikings, people who lusted for war and violence; they practically lived of killing other people. Kaag, however... was an assassin, he killed people because it was his job. None of the murders he commit are personal, it's just business. These Vikings though... much worse.

What the Plague Doctors were about to do... completely fine.

"Kaag?"

The man turned around to see Cassindra and five other assassins, armed and ready with their swords and wristbows.

"My team is ready. What's our next move?"

The leader returned to his position of looking over the side of the ship and at the island in the distance. With the ship being as close to Outcast Island as it was, he could barely make out the Vikings that currently inhabited the gigantic rock.

"Quick attack, nice and quiet... but efficient. We are here to kill a teenage dragon trainer, not to waste our time on war craving Outcasts. Move in, get it done nice and quickly... and then the other assassins and I will follow your lead."

"Alright, you heard him," Cassindra started to her group. She pointed at three assassins. "Burrows, Thomas, Gripcus, you're up."

The swordsmen trio stepped forward, all of them drawing their swords. They came to a halt, exchanged a quick look and then, before their fellow warrior's eyes, disappeared. As the attack was set into motion, the assassin in red began walking back towards his room of the ship. He was momentarily stopped by the voice of his protÃ©gÃ©.

"Sir, where are you going?" asked the voice. He turned around to address her.

"Just continue with the attack please, Aleries." His gaze suddenly darkened. "There is something I need to tend to."

Not waiting for a reply from his successor, the man continued his way to his room until he was back inside and sat back down at his desk, his eyes back on that black crystal. Releasing a deep breath, he moved his right hand forward and this time, with no interruptions (apart from the very distant screams of the Outcasts), was able to grip strongly on the black rock.

And in that moment, the fifty year old was no longer within the small space of the 'high castle'. No, now he stood in a place that had been ruined long ago, ravaged by the darkness and left as a place for the shadows to roam. He stood in a clearing of a forest, made up completely of black, dead trees and blood red leaves. Screams and whispers met his ears as demons and other dark life made movements in this dark void. The sky was not sky blue, like it should be. Instead, it was a swirl of dark blue and the colour black that made up this once beautiful landscape.

A voice called out from the shadows.

"**Kaag... my old friend.**"

Appearing in front of him like how he himself would to an assassination target, he stood. A man shaped creature, but in no way a man when it comes to morality. He was half naked, wearing a pair of black trousers over his blue skinned legs. He was skinny but muscular, his lack of upper clothing showing a dark blue skinned body, littered with red scars, abdominal muscles part of the picture also. The arms were covered in scratches and bite marks, scattered all over the limbs as if he had just escaped from a mad murderer with no proper weapon. His head held the most horrifying pair of blank black eyes, no soul or humanity to be found, and long black hair that looked as if it had never been cleaned and reached down to his lower back. He did not have normal human fingers, instead having sets of

metal-like claws that shined silver and finally, wore a similar pair of boots to Kaag and his assassins on his undoubtedly dark blue feet.

This was the _NightWatcher_, the one who had 'blessed' Kaag with the dark abilities he made use of today.

The creature crossed his arms. **"It's been a long while... but you have managed to gain my interest again."** The voice was gravely, as if he had just swallowed a load of nails, and a second distorted voice spoke at the exact same time. He raised his blue head to look at the sky of his world.

"How the years have passed... and the bodies have fallen." He lowered his head to stare at the human. **"I have called you into the Ominous Forest today to tell you... things are going to be different this time."**

He uncrossed his arms and dropped them to his sides, the claws barely reaching the bottom half of his black trousers. **"You and your people, the Plague Doctors, are about to embark on the assassination of a great boy who has brought a new age of peace... to his once violence lusting people. This time, you will not simply be able to fade into the shadows. This time... there **_will be** consequences."**

He took some steps forward, moving him close enough to Kaag so that their noses were almost touching. He smirked then, revealing a set of rotten, yellow, animalistic teeth. **"Your story is coming to its end and even you can't escape it. But I wonder... what end will you make for yourself?"** He took one step back from the assassin. **"I bring with me one last gift, Kaag; a gift that could just be able to save you from your past mistakes."**

"It is... a chain of events that will shape your next days. It is... a name."

Salara."

And just like that, without a word or sound of warning, the NightWatcher and his dark void of a home was gone and the murderous man was back in his wooden seat at his table on the Roman ship, the black crystal and chain gripped tightly in his right hand. He took several deep breathes, his eyes wide all the while.

"Err, sir?" The man raised his head to see one of his assassin soldiers. "The attack on the island has been successful. Cassindra and her team have secured it for us, the Outcasts will not be a problem to our mission anymore, she says." Kaag nodded.

"Thank you." The assassin walked from his master's view as Kaag rose from his seat. He took one last look at the crystal in his palm before moving it to his overcoat pocket. What did that name mean, Salara? Who was she? Was she a threat... or an ally?

Only time would tell.

The man, after pocketing his cursed jewel, used his black magic abilities to appear at the side of his only female follower. When his feet touched the rocky ground of Outcast Island, he came to the sight

of Cassindra and his many other assassins standing over many bleeding corpses. Any other person would have seen this as a great waste of life. Not Kaag though. Like he had said to himself before... these Vikings had done much worse than he had... they deserved it. The assassins in black bowed to their master before Cassindra began to speak.

"The island is ours now master," she stated. "These Vikings were the one of the easiest groups of people to take down I've seen in a long time." She shook her head. "But hey, when you've got a group of trained swordsmen, wristbows and black magic on your side... there isn't really a lot that can challenge you."

"I know that all too well, Aleries." Kaag replied. He raised his head slightly to address the whole group. "This island will be our base of operations until the target has been assassinated. Go back to the ship, bring over as many supplies as you can, find them a place and then continue doing that until everything has been moved onto this rock." He paused to move his head about a little before continuing. "And clean up this mess while you're at it."

The soldiers began their jobs, all vanishing into thin air. Except for one, Zylum, one of the new recruits that had been recovered from the streets.

"Excuse me sir?" He started to his leader, who raised an eyebrow. "Before I help the others, I think it would be good for me to tell you that during the takeover, I managed to catch sight of two Vikings fleeing the island by rowing boat towards the island of the target. They looked really scared, probably because all of their friends were dropping like flies."

Cassindra spoke up. "Should I send some men after them, sir?" she asked.

Kaag shook his head. "No... let them run." He turned his head to look off into the now foggy sea and the corners of his mouth quirked up, revealing a more evil side. "With this... it will be even more satisfying when I manage to get that kid on the end of my blade. With this, he will know that a great threat is near... and yet, he will still be unable to save himself." He turned around so as to look at the mask of Zylum. He then raised his arm so that the back of his left hand was by his mouth.

"Mortis... Atlan... come to me."

Two assassins, dressed identically to Zylum, suddenly appeared next to the new recruit. They both dropped to their knees, their mask covered eyes staring at their master as Zylum gave the older man a tilted head in question.

"Master Kaag, you called for us," Atlan spoke. "What is your will?"

"Gentlemen, the true beginning of our mission is upon us," Kaag said. "While the rest of the group is making this rock appropriate to be our base of operations while we are here, I want you three to keep an eye on the fog situation. When the fog has cleared enough for you three to see Berk in the distance, I want you all to teleport over there." Mortis and Atlan both stood up at this, now standing next to

an equally anticipant Zylum.

"Gentlemen, do you know how much money Emperor Alexios is offering us to make sure this Viking doesn't reach his sixteenth birthday?" The trio shared a look quickly, resulting in Atlan shaking his head. "The Emperor is offering us _30,000 coins_, gentlemen.

"Now, I don't know about you three... but I do not want this target that is worth so much to us to be some wimp when it comes to hand-to-hand combat; I want a _challenge_. So, I want you three to go to that island... and attack him. Not kill him, just _attack_. And then, when you're done, leave a message, let him know we will be returning. That way, if he _is_ weak in one on one fighting... he might try to improve so that his last fight is something that can be respected and remembered. Is that clear to all of you?"

No hesitation, the three nodded their heads, prompting Kaag to smile sincerely for once.

"Good. Get going now, if the fog clears fast enough and you three get the job done quickly, you should be able to get back by night fall." With only the final word of 'master' coming from their mouths, the assassins ran off to the side of the island, intent on watching the distance until the fog disappeared.

"Master!" Kaag turned his head to see another black-clad assassin running towards him.

"Master, you have to see this!"

"See what, Reflux?"

"Leptus, Conner and I were searching the island's prison cells for anything that we didn't need on the island and so could get rid of. However, just as we were finishing up, we came across a cell that contained a prisoner. He is badly beaten sir, bruises all over his arms... and I bet there are marks in other places as well." Kaag raised an eyebrow at his follower.

"And I have to see this person because...?"

"Sir, he told us not to touch him; told us that we were not allowed to come near the great..." Reflux cleared his throat with a cough. "Dagur... the Deranged."

Kaag's eyes hardened into stone. "Take me to him. Now."

* * *

><p>Minutes later, the oldest resident of the island found himself following Reflux, both of them within the rocky prison tunnels of Outcast Island. All the while, there was complete silence between them; Reflux only focusing on taking his leader to Dagur and Kaag deciding how much he was going to scare the Berserker before killing him.<p>

Kaag had never liked the Berserkers; they had always talked a big game. However, on the day Kaag received an assassination request from an anonymous Berserker, asking for Kaag to kill Chief Oswald the Agreeable, he learnt all about the heir to the chieftom, Dagur the

Deranged.

Kaag had hated Dagur the moment he laid eyes on him. Granted, it had been from a rooftop whilst on the mission to kill Oswald... but Kaag had seen and heard the boy, the way he ordered innocent people around like he already owned the place. On that day, Kaag had honestly thought the teen could not get any lower.

But then Kaag hadn't received the bounty on Oswald the Agreeable.

It was obvious that Dagur was the one who had come up with the idea of having his father assassinated, he was power hungry and with his father dead, the chieftom was his for the taking. Kaag had to admit, the kid had been clever in getting some other Berserker to write the assassination request. If he himself had done it, the Plague Doctors might have caught immediately.

But Dagur had made a grave mistake that day. By not paying the bounty... he had signed his own death warrant.

And now... it was time to carry out the execution.

The pair soon came across a cell with two other assassins stood in front of the bars, both with their arms crossed and watching something inside the cell intently.

"Leptus, Conner," Reflux began as they approached. "Why the silence?"

"He has not said another word since you left to tell master of who was down here," The assassin Conner answered. "He said something about us not being worthy of hearing his voice." He scoffed and hit a fist against the cell bars. "Big words coming from the dog in a jail cell."

Kaag took this moment to peer at the young man. He was not chained up like he should be; he merely stood in the corner of the makeshift room made of rock with his back turned to the killers. His helmet was missing, his hair was ragged and his clothes were in tatters.

"Let me have a word with him," he said before glaring. "Dagur and I have something we need to talk about." The man was happy to notice the Berserker's head rise slightly at that.

There were no words of objection as Leptus, Conner and Reflux all made their leave via black magic.

The assassin held his arms behind his back; it was just him and Dagur now.

"Do you recognise my voice, Dagur?" he asked. There was a whole minute of silence between them before the Berserker finally replied.

"No." Was what the voice said, the speaker's head still looking at the wall. "Should I?"

Kaag smirked. Here we go.

"Well, I think you should... considering I was the man who drove a

blade through your father's body and stilled his heart for the promise of money."

Dagur suddenly stiffened... like, really stiffened. If Kaag hadn't notice that, along with the silence following his words, he might have believed the boy had become a statue.

Finally, the Viking turned around, allowing the murderer-for-hire to see him in all his shame. Like Reflux had told him, Dagur was coated in bruises; they covered his face, arms and were probably hidden beneath those ripped articles of clothing as well. His skin was pale (a result of not seeing much sunlight), dry blood from old cuts was stuck to his face and his hair was really greasy.

The old man couldn't help but shake his head. "My... how the mighty have fallen." Dagur did not speak a word; he knew he was on thin ice.

"Dagur, I'm just going to get this over with, I have work to do. I'm actually very smart, you know. Because of this, I am not fooled by much... and I know a great deal about a lot of people. You, Dagur the Deranged, are no mystery to me... despite the fact that this meeting is the first time we have actually met face to face. I am fully aware that you are the son of Oswald the Agreeable and that you were desperate for the chieftom over the Berserkers.

Bottom line is this: it was quite smart of you... to get another Berserker to right that assassination request. If I hadn't known that you were really power hungry, I might not have thought you were the true employer. But Dagur... you have to understand now. No hard feelings or anything, it's not personal... but what kind of image would I be setting if I let you get away with not paying the bounty?"

Warning: Gory scene ahead.

Kaag drew his Gronkle iron sword with his right hand and stared into Dagur's watery eyes.

"Any last words?"

A whimper and the falling of tears were his only answer.

"So be it."

Kaag vanished from his position outside the cell bars, only to reappear within the confined space, about a foot away from the crying boy. As Dagur's flowing, wide eyes met with Kaag's enraged orbs, the assassin's sword was thrust into his stomach, forcing the teen onto his knees.

Kaag wasted no time and pulled the blade from the Berserker, allowing the blood to flow like a waterfall onto the prisoner's tattered articles of cloth. Dagur raised his head so as to look at his killer one more time, the older man spinning his sword in his grip before he swung right, the cutting edge of the metal slashing the boy's head from his body.

The body fell to the rocky ground, the tainted blood swamping Kaag's boots. He sheathed his sword, eyed the corpse in disgust and then

moved his left arm so that the back of his hand was by his mouth.

**Gory scene finished.**

"Gillerimo, come to me."

An assassin-in-black appeared beside his boss in the next second on one knee. "Sir, you called for me. How can I be of service?"

"I want you to help some of the others with cleaning this island of its dead bodies... you can start with this one."

And with that, Kaag vanished, leaving Gillerimo to fix the mess his leader had created.

"Mortis, the fog has cleared," said Atlan. "Should we tell master Kaag?"

"No," answered Zylum from beside the pair. "He ordered that we keep an eye on the fog and that when we could see Berk, to go there and carry out his order."

"Well," Mortis began. "I can see the island."

"We all can," replied Atlan.

Zylum drew his sword. "Then let's go." He vanished into thin air.

The other two warriors drew their weapons and were gone too seconds later.

* * *

><p>(AN â€" There we go, chapter two done! I have that was a satisfying introduction to the true storyline. Please keep my fire going with reviews, it really helps to know that you guys care where this is going! Also, what did you all think of my new character, the NightWatcher? I know that that isn't really original but that was the best I could come up with! And soon... we may see how his 'gift' helps in the course of events to come._

I have decided that I am going to give you guys one more chapter before I give you guys another oneshot for my HTTYD 'Razor' universe. The next chapter will be an important one, it will be the first meeting of Hiccup and his assassin hunters, so things will really start to kick off and get in gear!

_A big thank you to my friend __**P-Artsypants **__who was kind enough to beta this for me! I hope to give you guys chapter three in the next two weeks! Thank you for reading, write for you all again soon!)_

3. Unwanted attention

_(A/N â€" Hello there again, my readers! I am __**soooooooooooooo **__happy that you all liked the first proper chapter of this fic. I really appreciate the reviews I have received, especially the ones

that said they liked my first of many Hiccstrid moments, even though I, honestly, thought they weren't that good. But seriously? Eight reviews for one update? That's actually one of the best turnouts I've ever had :) Thank you all so much! I don't mean to sound greedy and ungrateful... but do please keep them coming! As I said last chapter, they really help me realize how much you guys are enjoying this and only help to feed the fire of my writing (after all, look how quickly I got chapter 3 done, right?)_

_Before I start, as with last time, I would like to throw out a big thank you to all those who took the time to review last chapter!

__**ZefronsAngel**__, __**Dragonbow117**__, __**johnnylee619**__, the guest who reviewed under __**'Jo'**__, __**Arcawolf**__, __**Malik The Night Angel**__, my friend __**Ayame4679**__ and my Beta reader __**P-Artsypants**__, I give you all handshakes, hugs and kisses!_

I hope you are all looking forward to this chapter, because I have worked to balance this chapter well regarding the Vikings, the assassins and then the assassins meeting Hiccup for the first time. I won't spoil anything detail wise, but let's just say that in this chapter... things will start to get serious, plot wise and Hiccstrid wise (shippers, you may now squeal).

Buckle yourselves in readers, here we go.)

* * *

><p>Dead Man's Hand chapter 2 â€" Unwanted attention

—...—

—...—

—...—

... But he was.

* * *

><p>On the edge of the island on which the Viking village Berk stood, three men all clothed in complete black attire suddenly appeared out of thin air; each of them wore the mask of a Roman plague doctor and held a sword in their right hand. One of them, Mortis, turned their head so as to acknowledge the man who stood next to them.<p>

"Okay Zylum, what now?"

The man known as Zylum rotated his own head to return Mortis' masked stare. "Don't ask me, I just said we weren't to tell master Kaag that we were leaving for our mission. I'm the least experienced here; I don't know what we have to do next."

Mortis leaned over, moving his attention onto the third masked man. "Atlan?" he asked. Said warrior looked around the landscape, hoping to find something that could help the assassins find Berk immediately. A few moments later, he noticed markings in the dirt. He moved forward and got onto one knee to inspect them, Mortis and Zylum watching.

Atlan then stood. "Footprints," he said over his shoulder. "Most likely from those two Vikings who managed to escape with their lives." He turned around to face his companions. "If the Outcasts and the Berkians recently became allies, the two Vikings probably came here to ask for aid against us. We follow those footprints... we find the village."

Mortis took a step toward Atlan, a smirk behind his mask. "And with the village... we find the target."

Not speaking anymore words, the three bolted into the forest, following the footsteps with their swords drawn.

* * *

><p>"Astrid?"<p>

"..."

"Astrid? Astrid?"

"..."

"Astrid?"

"What!?"

Hiccup smirked at the grumpy girl who was currently walking alongside him, Toothless and Stormfly following closely. Despite Astrid getting a head start in their little race due to him dreamily staring at her in the distance, Toothless and his rider had still managed to out fly the blonde Hofferson and her Deadly Nadder. About ten minutes had passed since Hiccup's victory and so far, as they had walked along to Astrid's house (she claimed that she needed to pick something up before the two went to dragon training); the girl had not muttered a single word, choosing only to cross her arms and to glare off into the distance.

"Astrid, don't be mad," Hiccup said, prompting the girl to groan in frustration. "It was a dragon race, there was going to be a loser! And if I remember correctly, wasn't it _you _who challenged _me_?"

Astrid decided that the view had suffered her angry stare enough and so turned it onto her future chief. "I'm not angry over the fact that I lost!" she claimed. "I'm angry because the race was totally unfair to me!"

Hiccup gave her an 'are you serious?' look. "You... never brought this up before."

"Because I hadn't lost _that badly _before! You beat me by like... two minutes!"

"And what would you like me to do about that, exactly?"

Astrid quirked an eyebrow. "Oh, I don't know, maybe ask your dragon to slow down a bit in future?"

Hiccup scoffed. "Oh, come on Astrid! It's called a _race _for a reason; you must realize that you are just being ridiculous now!" The Viking in question only turned around again so as to avoid her friend's true words. The brunet then turned his view onto his dragon.

"And besides, Toothless is a _Night Fury_; a strike class dragon, so he is naturally one of the fastest dragon species."

It was Astrid who scoffed this time. "Night Fury my ass, we once claimed him to be 'the unholy offspring of lightning and death itself' and he's nothing more than a big snuggle buddy!" Almost as if to prove her statement, Toothless proceeded to rub his head against Stormfly's side affectionately (earning a worried look from the Deadly Nadder), a smile playing on his lips and his eyes closed.

Hiccup sighed before taking careful steps forward, putting him right next to his... sometimes more than friendly friend. "Come on, Astrid," he pleaded, only for the girl to turn slightly so that the boy was staring at the back of her head. Making a bold move, he wrapped his arms around her waist and plopped his head upon her left shoulder, causing her eyes to widen slightly and for a gentle blush to appear on her cheeks.

"Please Astrid," he said again before giving her a light squeeze. "Don't be mad at me. If it means so much to you, I'll try and get Toothless to slow down next time. Just... don't be angry please." The Hofferson sighed, the heat in her cheeks becoming harder to ignore. Why did he have to be so damn cute?

She uncrossed her arms, the limbs dropping to her sides, and turned her head to give him a small smile. "Alright," she said, her anger now gone. "I accept your apology." She leaned forward slightly and pecked his cheek, prompting him to give her that goofy smile.

Hiccup released her. "Ok," he began. "Let us be going; you said that we still need to pick something up from your house before we go to dragon training." And with that, the two Vikings and the two dragons finished their journey to Astrid's house in high spirits.

They reached her home only a few minutes later. Just as the group was walking up the path, the door of the house opened to reveal Astrid's father, William Hofferson (Astrid had said before that he had complained about the name a lot when he was a kid, causing Hiccup to chuckle and say 'he should be grateful'). He was your average Viking: muscular, strong, big brute of a man. He had an axe tossed over one shoulder and his terrible terror, Firefly (named after its yellow skin tone), on his other.

He noticed the group coming towards him and waved. "Morning you two!" he shouted with a smile. "Why are you back here? Don't you have dragon training this morning, Astrid?"

Hiccup turned to the blonde girl with a smirk. "Yes, we do Mr. Hofferson but we had to come back here because your daughter didn't take her memory out with her this morning."

Astrid retaliated with a punch to the boy's arm. "Shut. Up."

He chuckled. "Kidding," he said, as his friend stared daggers into his skull. William chuckled as well, seeing the chemistry between the two teens. Astrid had claimed many times that the two were not official yet, only really good friends but anyone who didn't know the pair would say they were boyfriend and girlfriend; it was only a matter of time until one of them bucked up and admitted their feelings.

The chuckle from his throat had attracted the pair's attention back onto him. He pointed to the door of his home with his free hand. "Alright, go on then," he said. "You two are the head and deputy head of the academy, yes? What would it look like if the two teachers showed up late to a dragon training lesson?"

Astrid, who was now almost through her front door, turned around to address her father. "I wouldn't go as far as that, dad. The only reason I am apparently the 'deputy head' is because Hiccup has a soft spot for me."

"Oh, leave me alone," the boy grumbled.

The two Hoffersons shared a laugh before Astrid shut the door. Momentarily alone, the older blonde of the family looked towards Hiccup, who was now stroking the head of his Night Fury.

"So... Hiccup."

The boy turned away from his dragon, an eyebrow raised. "Err... yes, Mr. Hofferson?"

William waved a hand dismissively. "Please, call me William... or dad, for that matter."

Oh, here we go, Hiccup thought, a frown crossing his lips.

William raised his free hand in a surrender motion when the brunette's expression changed. "Hiccup, will you just hear me out, son?"

The Haddock put his hands on his hips. "Are you going to talk to me about marrying Astrid and 'grandbabies' like my dad did earlier? Because if you are, I will just say to you what I said to him."

"And what exactly was that?"

"That me and Astrid, at the moment, are just good friends. You can get the idea of marriage and grandchildren out of your mind for the next couple of years."

"Oh, come now Hiccup!" the man protested to the teenager. "Everyone in the village knows that you two have feelings for each other! Why not just make it official now?" He moved forward and slipped a muscular arm around the boy's shoulders. "Wouldn't it be just lovely, waking up next to your beloved everyday and knowing that she would be there for the rest of your life?"

The teen frowned again. "Err... as appealing as that sounds... 'William'...neither me nor Astrid are sixteen yet so we are way too young to be married and to be parents at the moment, no matter how much you and your wife want a grandbaby."

William scoffed. "Ridiculous, son! Astrid's mother and I married at only seventeen! She fell pregnant only a year later and now look at the both of us: thirty-four years of age and happily awaiting a new member for our family."

Hiccup's reply was cut off as the door of the house opened, revealing Astrid who now had her axe in hand. The urge to face palm suddenly hit the boy full force when he caught sight of the weapon, how had he not noticed she didn't have that earlier? For today's dragon training lesson, the teens would be practicing airborne battle techniques so that the teens could put the melee weapons to a much more unique use when on the backs of their flying friends.

Just before the girl reached them, her father leaned into Hiccup's ear. "Seriously though son, don't hold it off to long," he whispered. "You never know when something will pop up and ruin everything. You need to live your life while you can."

"Got my axe!" Astrid stated as she reached the group.

Hiccup smiled. "Alright, good." He nodded to William. "Goodbye Mr. Hofferson, it was...nice...talking to you."

The blonde man waved goodbye as the teens and dragons continued towards the academy. "Remember what I said, son! You never know!" The group disappeared from his view as they descended a hill, prompting him to finally acknowledge the little dragon perched on his shoulder.

"Well Firefly," he began to his Terrible Terror. "I think my attempts to bring forth a grandchild have gone on long enough for one day. Let's go get some firewood." A dragon squawk was his only answer, earning a chuckle from the man.

"Oi, William!" the Hofferson turned around at the call of his name to meet the sight of the village blacksmith, Gobber, limping towards him.

"Morning Gobber," he greeted. "To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"Stoick sent me over. You and your wife need to get over to the great hall, pronto."

William raised an eyebrow. "Is...it okay if I know why? This is kind of out of the blue."

"He didn't tell me the full details. All I know is that we have had some...visitors in the last hour. They spoke with Stoick the first chance they got and now, he's asking for everyone to be in the great hall."

"Erm...okay, fine."

As Gobber walked off to tell other adults about the emergency meeting, William entered the house to find his wife.

* * *

><p>The group of four arrived at the dragon academy about ten minutes later, finding it completely empty. This was actually a shock to the two Vikings, considering this was the latest they had ever been to a lesson (after Astrid had made her pickup, Hiccup had rushed back to his house to fetch his Gronkle-iron shield with in-built crossbow).

"And my dad said about how _we _were going to be the ones getting shouted at for being late," Astrid commented, stroking Stormfly as Hiccup placed his shield on the arena's circular wall.

"Yeah," he replied. "What do you think they are up to?" he asked as he walked back over to his friend.

"Snotlout? No idea. Fishlegs? Probably playing 'catch the sheep' with Meatlug and the twins? Probably having another fight."

Hiccup gave her a suggestive look. "Or Fishlegs might be with Ruffnut whilst Snotlout and Tuffnut are doing something else".

Astrid chuckled. "Oh yeah, I've noticed something happening between those two lately."

Hiccup suddenly pointed a skinny finger at the girl. "Oh, by the way, _never _leave your father alone with me again."

The Hofferson snorted, humoured. "Why?"

The future chief shook his head. "You don't wanna know."

"No Hiccup, you've told me to keep my father away from you when no one else is around. I can't do that if I don't have a valid reason."

Hiccup nervously rubbed his neck. "Ok fine, I'll tell you but you can't get angry at me, ok?"

His friend gave him a confused look. "Why would I be angry?"

The brunet swallowed. "Your father... may have spoken to me about... marriage."

Instead of shouting out in anger like he expected, Astrid groaned. "Oh Odin, he's started on you with that as well?"

This time, it was Hiccup who looked confused. "Started on me'? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that my father has been going on at me to become a wife and a mother for the last month ever since Snotlout nearly made me go splat. He keeps on saying about how 'I never know when my life could turn upside down' and that 'I should make the most of it.'"

"That's kind of what he said to me! He said about how 'I don't know when something could pop up and ruin everything' and that I should 'live my life while I can'. The whole thing really annoys me."

The blonde raised an eyebrow at the boy. "What makes you say that? Has anyone else been going on at you?"

Hiccup scoffed. "Only my father Stoick the Vast, the great and noble chief of this village. He keeps trying to convince me that I should marry now so that the chances of me having an heir increase. I'm only sixteen! I'm not ready to be a husband _or _a parent yet!"

At that moment, Astrid crossed her arms and turned her head to the side, hoping to hide the blush on her cheeks. "Yeah," she muttered, "me neither." The girl had never reacted like this when talking about being a wife; she had only blushed because Hiccup had mentioned one day having an heir... leading Astrid to think about whom one day will be _providing _that heir.

She suddenly felt... really _warm_ inside.

A dragon roar sounded from the air just above the academy's metal chain roof. The two teens and the two dragons looked up to see what they had been waiting for: three dragons, all of different species, with their riders. It was Fishlegs and Meatlug who flew into the arena first, the twins on their Hideous Zippleback following shortly afterwards and Snotlout, on Hookfang, entering last.

"Well, glad to see you all took the time to actually come and see us," Hiccup said sarcastically as all of the teens slid off their dragons.

A look of embarrassment crossed Fishlegs' face. "Sorry Hiccup," he apologized. "We would've been here sooner... it's just that Meatlug didn't actually want to come to this lesson today." He pointed his Gronkle and the future chief noticed her uneasy expression.

"What's different to this lesson from any other lesson?" Tuffnut asked.

"We're using weapons today to see how riding dragons can help us during melee combat," Astrid informed. "For example, say that I was attacked by some guy riding a dragon whilst I was riding Stormfly. If I knew that Stormfly would be on the other side to catch me, she could throw me over him so that I could have a slash at his head and then catch me afterwards."

Snotlout laughed. "Ha, if you put it that way Astrid, why do we even _need _to have this lesson? It's not as if there are other Viking tribes who ride dragons."

"Actually, it could prove to be quite useful if the right circumstances came together," Fishlegs piped up. "I heard from my mum that Stoick is thinking of sending us six over to other tribes when we're older to spread the idea of riding dragons and the peace we have with them. If one day, we came into a war with one of those tribes and they used dragons against us, this training could help to make things a lot easier."

Hiccup smiled. "Thank you very much Fishlegs. So where's your weapon?"

Fishlegs raised an eyebrow. "Weapon? What weapon?"

"Your own personal weapon?" Hiccup asked tentatively, pointing out the axe that Astrid had thrown over her shoulder. "We were all supposed to bring our own weapons so that we could practice

_different _airborne melee techniques?"

On that note, Fishlegs lowered his head in shame, the twins looked at each other in confusion and Snotlout just sighed out of boredom, that 'couldn't care less' expression on his face.

The self-appointed academy teacher nodded and smacked his arms against his sides. "Great."

"I'm sorry Hiccup!" Fishlegs cried. "I forgot that we had to bring our _own _weapons! Despite this being a dragon academy, we do actually still keep weapons around here in some spaces! Can't we just use those?"

"No Fishlegs, we cannot just use those," Hiccup replied, annoyed. "All we have here are swords and shields. If we all just used those for the training exercise, we would all be learning how to do it... with weapons that we, us six teens, would only use if our own weapons were damaged." He turned his attention onto the Thorstons. "I can already tell from your looks of wonder that you two had no idea what was going on today." Finally, he looked towards his cousin. "And you Snotlout? What's your reason?"

The Jorgenson shrugged his shoulders before smirking. "I _chose _not to bring it, little cous."

"Why?" Hiccup asked, teeth clenched.

Snotlout bounced his eyebrows as that smirk remained on his lips, mocking the dragon trainer. "I thought it might irritate you."

Hiccup groaned. Ever since the Hooligan-Outcast peace treaty signing, Hiccup and Snotlout had become friendlier toward one another. They now spoke to each other more in a friendly or joking attitude instead of a mocking one and also respected one another a lot more. However, days like today still existed, those days in which Snotlout would disobey a direct order from his cousin just to spite him.

"Alright then," the auburn haired boy begun. "So nobody apart from Astrid and I have their own weapons. What are we supposed to do today for training then? It's not as if Astrid and I can do the training exercise by ourselves."

Snotlout's expression suddenly turned sly. "I don't think you would mind that that much, Hiccup. In fact, I think we _all _know you wouldn't mind."

Both Hiccup and Astrid blushed, earning laughs from the other four teens. "Ok, seriously though," the humiliated Haddock continued. "What are we going to do for training today?"

Snotlout walked over to the past village embarrassment and tossed an arm around his bony shoulders. "Let's have a day off!" he shouted. "We have been training _every day _even though we have a fresh peace treaty with the Outcasts. There isn't really a threat at the moment Hiccup, let's just have a day of pure relaxation."

The Night Fury rider scratched his neck. "Err... I don't know Snotlout," he countered. "We never know when a threat could pop up

out of nowhere. We really _should _train every day." Before he could protest any further, Ruffnut walked up next to her future chief and threw an arm over his shoulders as well, trapping him between two very persistent Vikings.

"Come on Hiccup," she began, determination for that day off in her eyes. "Like Snotbrain said, we've been training every day! I'm sure we can have _one _day to just hang out."

"Hey!" Tuffnut shouted as he walked right up to his sister. "I was gonna team up with Snotlout to get us that day off!"

Ruffnut got right up in her brother's face, smirking. "Why didn't you then?"

"I was... thinking of a better approach!"

"Yeah, of course you were."

Tuffnut then proceeded to head butt his sister with his helmet, giving her reason to tackle him to the ground. Before they knew it, they were in a full on fight whilst the other four teens simply watched.

"So anyway," Snotlout continued with a smile after watching the twins for about a minute. "That day off?"

Hiccup groaned. "Err... I don't know."

"Give it up Hiccup," Astrid called as she lowered her axe off her shoulder and into both hands. "We are just as much in the wrong as them, the only difference is that we took the time to go home and get our weapons. What's one day gonna do?"

The boy sighed before turning to smile at her. "Alright then!" he shouted with that smile still on his face. "We'll have a day off." Cheers erupted from Snotlout and the twins on the ground, Fishlegs smiling and stroking his dragon. "What should we do then?"

Ruffnut stood up from the arena floor, a few cuts and bruises now on her arms and face. "I say we go down to one of this island's great beaches and we just relax, maybe play some sort of game..." She paused as she turned her head to look at the other girl of the group. "And then maybe Astrid can snuggle up with her _not _boyfriend." More laughs came from Snotlout, Fishlegs and Tuffnut, Hiccup only blushing as the Hofferson gave her female friend a death glare.

"Alright then, you guys all go down there, I'll catch up," Hiccup started as his friends told their dragons to fly off home. "I've got to make sure everything is alright here before I lock it up." Astrid turned away from the sight of her flying Deadly Nadder to look at her auburn haired friend.

"You sure, Hiccup?" she asked. "We could wait for you if you want."

Hiccup smiled and waved a hand dismissively. "Nah, I'm fine. Go down to the beachside, Toothless and I will be along soon."

His attention was averted from his departing friends to said Night

Fury, the dragon rubbing its head against its rider's legs lovingly. He chuckled, stroking the dragon's head.

Little to the knowledge of the teenage Vikings, perched on three different rooftops, were three men clothed entirely in black. They wore masks on their faces, all of which resembled a type of bird, and all had swords, sheathed and attached to their hips.

"What should we do now?" Asked one of them. "Should we attack? With all of the adult Vikings at that meeting within the great hall, now would be the best time to strike."

One of the other two shook their head slightly. "No Zylum, not yet." He moved his head slightly, diverting his vision down to the five teens making their way to the beach. "If this conflict we are about to have stretches on too long, those teens are going to come back for him... or at least, the dark blonde girl will. Despite master Kaag saying to do whatever is necessary, it would be much cleaner and a better execution if they did not enter the fray."

"Ok then Atlan, what do you suggest?" the assassin who spoke before, Zylum, asked with a snide tone.

The assassin being questioned took a long look at the five teenagers currently making their way out of the village. From the looks of things, if they travelled the way Atlan expected, the group would pass by that small armoury, where the door had carelessly been left ajar. With all of the adults at the emergency meeting at the great hall (no doubt about the new threat that lay on Outcast Island), there would be no one to stop an assassin trapping the teens within the small building.

"Mortis," he called to his fellow hunter. Within seconds, the other swordsman was next to him, ready to hear what he had to say. He whispered into the man's ear, telling him what to do regarding the final obstacle between them and the target. Mortis pulled away from Atlan shortly afterwards, nodded and then after taking a final look at the Viking teens, vanished.

"I'm just saying babe, all of this... it doesn't just happen," Snotlout said, flexing his muscles for the umpteenth time.

"Snotlout, will you give it up already?" Ruffnut groaned, actually a bit tired of him flirting with Astrid herself. "Weren't you the one who just made a joke about Hiccup and Astrid? Why are you flirting with her if you were making fun of the two earlier?"

"I never said that I accepted anything," he responded with a smirk. "I only said those things because I knew it would get a reaction out of Hiccup."

As Tuffnut and Snotlout bumped fists for the Jorgenson's 'amazing comeback', Astrid Hofferson found her attention suddenly drawn away from her friends and towards something you don't see every day.

Or... hear every day.

Her head turned left, her vision focused on one of the village's new

armouries (in order to prevent an enemy stealing all the weapons of the village, Stoick had ordered for the weapons to be stored in different areas around the village). The door was open, practically inviting her inside, and from in there she could've sworn she heard a strange sound; it had been similar to the sound she heard whenever Hiccup and Toothless flew by her at almost unnatural speeds. She squinted, focussing her eyesight.

At the very back of the small building, standing in the darkness, stood a person dressed in strange attire; his clothes in no way a Viking's. Everything he wore was black, his brown leather boots and pale yellow trousers excluded: some kind of coat that reached to his knees, a cloak that covered his whole body from the waist up, a pair of elbow length gloves and finally, a mask that resembled some kind of bird. Astrid could see that the mask's bird beak was made of metal, that it was held to the person's face by small metal buckles and that there was glass circles set in it where his eyes would be.

They just... _stared _at each other. Astrid's blue eyes were filled with wonder, a little bit of fear (fear of the unknown) and a bit of panic. Who was this person? Where was he from and what did he want? It was impossible to see his eyes, hidden from view behind those glass eye barriers on the mask.

'_Come here'_ , his stare seemed to say. '_Come and face me.' _

Unaware of what she was doing, Astrid found herself moving forward as her axe dropped into a two hand grip. She took slow steps, full of strength to face this strange... _person_.

"Astrid?"

The blonde blinked and shook her head lightly before facing her friends, all of whom were looking at her as if she had gone mad. "Err... are you coming to the beach or what?" Ruffnut asked, pointing over her shoulder with her thumb.

Astrid shook her head again. "Hang on guys, you have to see this..." she turned to look inside the armoury and in that next second, her friends were looking at her impersonation of a fish out of water.

The man in black was gone.

As if he had just... _vanished._

She gaped at nothing, her friends now coming over to see what she was so shocked about. Finding nothing out of the ordinary, Snotlout raised a worried eyebrow. "Err... babe, are... are you okay?" he asked.

Astrid glared at him and then stepped back a little to address all of them. "Guys, I _swear _to you all right now, on _Loki's grave_... there was someone in there." Her friends exchanged looks, all of them freaked out and confused. "I'm not making it up!" she insisted. "There was someone in there, at the back of the armoury. They... were dressed in some _really _weird clothes; I've never seen anything like it and he wore this strange mask that looked like a bird's

beak!"

Snotlout chuckled and threw an arm around her shoulders. "Astrid, Astrid, Astrid... if you wanted my attention so badly, why didn't you just say so?"

The girl, having had enough, punched the Jorgenson square in the face, knocking him to the ground and eliciting laughs from the twins. "Guys, I'm telling you now I am not crazy! There was someone in there, I swear it!"

Ruffnut smirked at her friend, placing a hand on her hip. "Oh yeah Astrid? Then where is this person now? Cause I don't see any strangely dressed person in there."

The 'crazy' Viking gripped her axe tightly as a defiant glare appeared on her lips. "I'll prove it to you!" she shouted, storming off into the armoury as her friends watched with joking smiles. "I'm not crazy! He has to be here somewhere!" The twins, Fishlegs and Snotlout (who had managed to get himself off the ground) followed after her into the small building, looks of general concern taking them over again as Astrid began looking around frantically.

Fishlegs frowned and scratched his head before leaning over to Tuffnut. "Tuff," he began. "Has Ruffnut ever acted like this before? Like, out of the blue?"

The male twin raised an eyebrow in reply. "No. Why?"

"I'm wondering... is this a female thing?"

"It is NOT a female thing!" The Hofferson screamed, throwing around some weapons in desperation and scaring her big friend. "There was someone here, in this armoury, right where I am standing! You have to believe me!"

The other four teens just exchanged looks of worry and fear, their friend looking to all of them, looking for any form of support.

Eventually, she growled, her grip on her axe shown by white knuckles. "Fine, you guys don't want to believe me? Fine! Hiccup's probably getting lonely anyway!" She pushed past her 'friends', all of them now speaking apologies and reaching out hands to stop her (none of them actually touching her though). Just as she was about to exit the armoury, a cloud of black smoke flashed right in front of Astrid and the others, that noise sounding straight afterwards.

The man with the bird mask stood before them, blocking the only way out of the small building. They all, despite their strong Viking personalities, screamed at his appearance. Before the Hofferson could do anything to stop him, the masked man delivered a kick to her stomach, sending her flying backwards into the other four teens.

All groaning on the floor in pain, the dragon riders could only watch as the man slowly shut the door, sealing them in darkness. Outside, his hand suddenly began to glow a light green, the hand pointing at the space just below the door handle.

A satisfying click met his ears.

Mortis turned around with a raised head, nodding to the other two assassins who both nodded back before vanishing. The warrior then drew his sharp blade, determination in those concealed eyes, and ran towards the dragon training academy as loud knocks, protests and colourful curses emitted from the armoury.

* * *

><p>Toothless moved away from Hiccup's stroking hand.<p>

Hiccup raised an eyebrow. "Bud, what's wrong?" he asked, stepping forward towards his Night Fury. The dragon took a further step back at the approach, his green eyes darting all over the place.

He turned his head a little and spotted something he didn't like. He growled, his teeth unsheathing from their gums as he stepped around his rider protectively.

"Toothless, what's gotten into you?" Hiccup queried again, his tone now worried instead of wondrous. His friend did not respond this time, he only continued his feral behaviour, his tail circling his boy's legs. Finally moving his own vision to where Toothless was looking, the Haddock discovered what was driving the dragon into his current attitude.

At the academy entrance, a person stood, armed with a sharp silver blade. He was almost completely dressed in black, his boots and trousers being the only exceptions. His face was covered by a mask that resembled a bird, the eyes made of glass. He did not attempt to flee upon seeing the dragon's anger... and yet did not make any move to get closer either.

He just... stood there.

Hiccup rested a trembling hand on his friend's scaly head. "Alright Toothless... no irrational movements or actions. He doesn't _seem _to be that much of a problem...so we can just..."

The man took a threatening step closer, throwing Toothless into action. He roared and threw himself forward, his teeth gleaming in the sunlight and his dark claws prepared to sink into this intruder's flesh, the same passion a mother protecting her young would have glowing within him.

Hiccup's eyes widened. "Toothless, what are you doing?! Stop!"

For once in a long time, his friend did not listen to him; he only continued using his great speed to close the space the space between him and this swordsman (who now stood completely still).

Hiccup closed his eyes tightly. He couldn't watch.

Just as Toothless' claws were about to pin the man to the rocky ground, he disappeared from the dragon's sudden blood-lusting sight. He landed on the spot where the man had been, whimpering and confused.

The future chief opened his eyes, confusion coming to him as well at seeing Toothless by himself.

The arena door suddenly came crashing down, separating the pair.

A strange sound made itself known to Hiccup's ears, the sound that reminded him of those times when a dragon would fly by him extremely fast, so fast he wouldn't even be able to see what species it was until it was far off in the distance.

Only a few feet before the Haddock, out of black clouds that had formed out of mid air, three people appeared. They were all dressed exactly like the man Toothless had just tried to attack, masks and all. It couldn't just be a coincidence; one of them _had _to be him.

The masked man who already had his sword in his hand turned his head barely to address another. "Zylum," he started. "Keep an eye on the beast." Zylum turned around fully to spot the ferocious Night Fury growling by the arena gate. He raised his left arm slightly, pointing the wristbow contraption on his wrist at the dragon.

"Yes, Mortis." He fired a wristbow bolt at the cage-like gate, forcing the winged 'devil' away. Toothless did as Zylum wished, slowly backing off from the gate as his eyes remained on his trapped hatchling. Letting out a final feral hiss, the Night Fury ran away from the assassins and the gate altogether.

As Zylum moved around the arena, the other two assassins moved closer to their target. With every step the men took forward towards him, Hiccup stepped back with quaking legs. There was a dreaded feeling of malice coming from these people, one that was tainted with the feeling of a motive that could never be relented.

The one who had been keeping an eye out for Toothless, Zylum, paused from his search to run his masked eyes over the dragon trainer's body. "So," he began, "_this _is the great dragon conqueror." He scoffed, turning his eyes back to the arena ceiling. "I was expecting a lot more from someone with such a great title."

Hiccup's own orbs were darting all over the place, searching for anyway out. Toothless would find a way to help, he always did. He would come blasting through the metal chain ceiling... or would come along with Stoick and or Astrid at his side. He _had _to.

Hiccup laughed nervously, his hands coming up in a 'don't come any closer' motion. "Ok, I... I don't know who you all are... or why you are here... but if you want to talk to somebody important on the island, I would recommend my father. You see, he is the one who sorts out _all _of the things on this island... he is the chief, after all."

The one who had ordered Zylum earlier, Mortis, scoffed himself. "We're not seeking your father, Viking," he said, prompting the young boy to gulp.

"Err, you sure? Big man, large red beard? You can't miss him."

The third assassin, who had not spoken a word before now, chuckled. "We didn't, kid. However... I think it is fair to say that _he _will be missing _you _very much."

The assassin beside Mortis drew his blade, attracting Zylum's attention away from his task.

Hiccup's back touched the arena wall, his eyes as wide as they could be and his breathing laboured. "Okay guys, I don't want any trouble, o-okay? Please. I can... I'm sure that _whatever _you want, my father can provide and then... you can be on your w-way and we'll all forget this e-ever happened."

"_Whatever _we want, kid? You sure about that?" Mortis asked.

"Yeah, I'm sure. I-I'm sure that he will give you, literally, _whatever _you want, a-anything at all!"

The two assassins paused in their approach and exchanged glances.

"What do you think, Atlan?" Mortis questioned.

The swordsman beside him shook his head. "No, I don't think that the Viking chief is going to be able to give us what we want."

"Err... what... w-what _do _you want?" the Haddock asked, fear laced within his curious words.

Mortis moved his sword forward to have the point just meters before Hiccup's face. "A _challenge _is what we want. Show us what _you _have, Viking; not what your little dragon can do."

Before Hiccup could utter a response, a blur of black dragon came crashing through the metal chain ceiling, the hole created by a powerful plasma fire. The resulting explosion caused the arena to fill with smoke, playing out a similar from not too long ago.

"What in the name of master Kaag was that?!" Atlan screeched, all three assassins looking around in complete madness. He turned his fury onto the coughing Zylum. "Zylum! You idiot!"

Said man in black looked up from his position to eye one of his two partners. "What?"

"You were supposed to be keeping an eye out for that blasted fiend of a dragon!"

"Will you two quit your squabbling!?" Mortis screamed from somewhere else in the smoke. "Find him! Now!"

"He can't have gotten away," Zylum began. "He couldn't have possibly..."

SMACK!

The rest of the young warrior's words were cut off as he went flying through the cloud of smoke with the speed of an arrow. He went straight past his two comrades before smashing into the arena wall. He slid down to the ground then, where he fell to his side.

Atlan held his breath as his other comrade ran over to the unmoving assassin. "Zylum!" Mortis shouted, sitting him upright. "Zylum, Can you hear me?"

The wounded groaned, a hand coming up to run his head. "Yeah... I'm... I'm fine."

Mortis groaned. "The beast sent you straight into the wall. You need to keep an eye out or you are going to get yourself killed!"

A roar sounded out as the smoke cloud began to disappear, drawing the views of all three black magic men. At this moment, Toothless and Hiccup, who had managed to get onto his dragon's saddle in the ensuring chaos, flew through the new entryway the Night Fury had created in the arena.

"Go after him!" Mortis ordered. "Now!"

With that, the trio vanished, only black smoke left behind.

A great feat above their village, Hiccup and Toothless paused mid-flight. They turned around and looked down into the training arena, seeing the arena empty.

"Any signs of them, bud?" the boy asked, patting the dragon's head softly. Said winged reptile crooned, rubbing his head further into his boy's touch. He was just glad to have gotten his rider away from those _bad _men. Toothless had _sensed _that there was something not right about that man who had revealed himself to the pair; _that_ was why he had attacked so suddenly.

The dragon didn't know how to place it, there had just been something about those people that had made them so much more...

_Darker... _than everyone else.

"Alright bud, let's get down and find my dad," Hiccup said. "We need to tell him about this. Now."

"Hiccup!"

The one being called looked down past his friend's flapping wings. Down below, standing by an open armoury, were his friends, all looking up at him with Astrid waving.

Whereas he would normally be happy to see his crush, Hiccup was not exactly happy to see her and his other friends now. "Err, what does she want?" he asked. He leaned over slightly to look directly at Toothless. "Just ignore her for now bud, we need to go find my dad."

Hiccup's words were not met with the ordinary and very much affectionate croon. Instead, they were met with a sudden roar, one laced with pure pain and agony. The Night Fury's eyes slammed tightly before he began plummeting towards the group of now horrified teens, his rider holding on tightly to the saddle.

"Toothless!" The boy shouted in panic. "What happened!? What's wrong!? Toothless, bud!"

The duo collided with the ground, Astrid and the others running towards them immediately. Not wasting anytime, Hiccup jumped from his friend to examine him for any wounds.

It didn't take him long to find the problem and when he did, tears threatened to crawl down his cheeks.

For there, sticking out from his best friend's belly, were two arrows. They had pierced the dragon well, lodging them into place enough that they could not simply be removed with a bit of pull and tug. What was worse though, was the other wound Toothless had received. There was a bloody hole in his right wing; a third arrow had gone clean through the reptile's wing.

Hiccup dropped to his knees, his ability to breathe seemingly gone and his hands on the dragon. "Hiccup!" Astrid called, now only a couple of feet behind him with the other teens trailing afterwards. "What happened?" She paused in her step, seeing the new hole in Toothless' wing.

Before the blonde could reach him, the dreaded sound that the two had already become familiar with came out of nowhere. Now, standing in front of the teens with their target and his wounded dragon behind them, were the three assassins.

Astrid's grip on her axe tightened discreetly. It did not take someone of Hiccup's intellect to explain to her that these three people were the ones who just shot Toothless down. They seemed to want Hiccup exposed and defenceless; that explained why one of them had trapped the other teens and herself in the armoury beforehand. But the real question was... why did they want him defenceless?

Her face set itself into a slate of no emotion, desperately trying to hide her worry. There was only one reason why they would want that.

One of the men raised his sword, pointing it at the Hofferson. "I locked you up in that armoury for a good reason, girl," he said. "You and your friends are not required here; this is not your affair."

The one being 'challenged' stepped forward, her axe trapped in white knuckle vices and her anger now showing on her face. "It is very much my affair," she spat, Ruffnut and Snotlout stepping up beside her. "You see, that boy you have behind you there... the one you three are probably trying to kill... happens to be..." she breathed out slowly. "My best friend. So if you think I'm just going to stand here..."

One of the other two assassins raised his head barely. "I will admit, I admire your protective spirit." He turned to address the one killer who had yet to address the Viking children. "Zylum, do you think you could... handle these insects?"

At the question, Zylum walked forward so that he was only a few feet before the protective female, his sword spinning in his right hand. "Atlan," he began, the sword coming to a stop. "It would be my utmost pleasure."

"HICCUP!"

The future chief, his faithful dragon, his friends and the three

assassins turned to the sky at the sound of a loud, bellowing roar of a voice. It had not been any voice though; this was the voice of a strong man, one who had lived through many years of violence only to come out unscathed, one who had served to protect his people through thick and thin. Riding towards the group of various peoples on his trusty Thunderdrum, Thornado, was the village chieftain, Stoick the Vast.

Zylum was not fast enough to move from his position before it was too late. The blue dragon the village leader rode released its thundering roar, sending the youngest swordsman through the air into an unlucky Viking's home. However, unlike back in the arena, Zylum did not recover from this attack and instead, fell to his side without as much as a twitch. Atlan and Mortis conjured black magic spells, vanishing from the scene in their familiar clouds of black smoke.

"Astrid, what's going on?" Stoick called as he ran up to the teens. "I went home and got Thornado as soon as I heard Toothless roar from the great hall." He reached the group and immediately noticed his son and the wounded dragon by which he knelt. The man sighed remorsefully, going down onto one knee.

"Hiccup?" he asked as a brawny hand came up to rest on his son's shoulder. The boy did not reply in any manner, only progressing in his journey into a guilt-laced hole. His best friend, the first one to treat him with any kind of companionship in over fourteen years, was now unconscious with great injuries... and it was his fault. The three assassins had paid a visit to Berk for him and him alone; any injuries or deaths that they inflicted were on his hands.

Hiccup's eyes widened, a gasp escaping him at the same time. If Stoick hadn't showed up at that moment, how much damage would have Zylum inflicted to his friends? Fishlegs? Snotlout?

... Astrid?

"Astrid, lass," Stoick began, standing back up onto his feet as Spitelout, Gobber and William Hofferson approached, obviously having heard Toothless' roar of agony when their leader had. "Please take Hiccup home. He needs some peace and quiet right now; I'll tend to him after things have been dealt with here."

He turned his authority to the twins. "Ruffnut, get to the healers and tell them that Toothless requires _immediate _attention. He will be brought up to them shortly but they need to prepare for healing a dragon." The female twin ran off with her job, allowing the chief to focus onto the other teens. "Snotlout, Tuffnut," he began before taking a momentary pause, turning his head to stare daggers into the out-cold magic man on the ground. "Take this _filth _down to the academy and lock him up, I'll get GoÃ°i to inspect him as soon as me and Fishlegs have moved Toothless to the healers." The pair followed their order, picking up Zylum and giving him their own sets of vile glares. The older Haddock turned to the bulky Ingerman. "You heard me son, go get your Gronkle and help me and Thornado take Toothless to the healers." Finally, Stoick turned to his most loyal adult followers. "You three," he started with a defending tone. "Prepare a search party and head out into the forestry; you are to find those other two... swordsmen... and you are to bring them back here for questioning. You are to search those woodlands _until night fall_.

And no word of _why _we are looking for these people. Not yet."

With the adults dashing off to prepare their search party and Stoick getting back onto Thornado, Astrid took the time to speak to her friend, who had never taken his eyes off of his wounded dragon.

"Hiccup?" she asked, resting one of her petite hands on his arm.

After what seemed like an eternity, the boy looked away from the Night Fury and stared his emerald orbs into Astrid's eyes. The sky blue eyes of this beautiful, loyal girl who had been prepared, alongside Ruffnut and Snotlout, to defend him these warriors who cast fear into others using the element of the unknown from their bird masks.

If Stoick hadn't turned up when he had... he didn't want to know what might've happened.

And with that, Hiccup's exterior turned to rubble. His face creased, his hands tightened into two bundles of knuckles and the dams of his eyes crumbled, allowing the tears to flow in high volumes. Without any hesitation, the Hofferson dropped her axe to the ground and took her friend into her arms, the auburn haired Viking burying his face into her neck to hide the tears and to hide the wails of guilt and fear.

The traumatized boy in her hold, Astrid looked up slightly. There, standing on the edge of a cliff, were the other two assassins, watching the teens.

Astrid's expression turned from one of sympathy for Hiccup to one of unmatched malice. She stared into the very souls of the two men, these men who had the nerve to attack Hiccup... but yet did not have the courage to remove those damned masks. Her squeeze on the boy tightened more, prompting him to wrap his own arms around her waist.

The two assassins then turned away, fleeing into the forests of Berk.

They would obviously be back; the Vikings had Zylum for questioning on the enemy. It was most likely not just those three; in fact, they were probably just scouts for a set of greater black magic users and throat slitting murderers. The village was about to have a strange war to protect their heir, their hope, their dragon rider, their _future_... and they were going to have to prepare for whatever these people had ready to throw.

And prepare, to protect Hiccup, Astrid Hofferson would do just that.

* * *

><p>(AN â€" And there we go!_

_Right guys, here's the gist. This will probably be the last update you guys are gonna get for a little while. Why? Many reasons. I am starting another story alongside this one so as to please two

audiences at once (Teen Titans story 'Welcome to Nightshroud City' â€” if you like that cartoon, action and a certain Dr. Jonathan Crane, keep an eye out for the first chapter), I am taking part in three different drama performances and so will be taking time to go to rehearsals and of course, I am back at school next week._

_With school back on, writing has been pushed down from my top priority. You see, I am going into year 12 which means I am starting A-levels... and they are going to be __**a lot... of work**__. Because of this, when school starts again, I will only be writing on weekends when I have done all my homework and caught up with the daily events in the news (one of the downsides to doing Government and Politics). However, please do not stress as I will still attempt to update for you guys frequently; you just have to remember that my education must come first._

Also, because of this change of events, I have decided to push back that HTTYD oneshot I said I was going to do so that when I am writing, I can focus my attention onto this and the Teen Titans story. I hope you guys don't mind, I just thought it would be better to update this than do a oneshot every now and then :)

_Please do leave me a review to show the love, especially now since I need to know that you guys still want more and are willing to wait a little for an update. I hope to update soon with chapter four of twenty one and look forward to (hopefully) reading some more positive comments! Thanks again guys, I love you all so much!) _

4. Author's note

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... Hey... guys...

_Now, please hear me out. As I stated last chapter, I A-levels at school back in September and did also state that they would be a whole load of work... and I was right. They are a __**bloody. Car killer. **_

I have barely had anytime to myself that isn't to do with work, so please do forgive me for this wait. It had gotten to the point that I was getting so much work, that whilst I was doing my studies, I had considered calling this story dead. However, I have done that too many times before and I really do not want to do it again now. So please, as of the update following this notice, please continue to give me loving and encouraging words with your great reviews, as they only proceed to fuel my fire and right now, I really do need them to keep me going (I would also appreciate any PMs if it looks like I fall behind again, I really don't want to send another fic of mine to an early grave!)

_I cannot promise that I will be getting these up on a regular basis anymore, but please do remember that behind all those dates of no new

chapters, I am still typing here on my computer to entertain all of you. So please know that as of now, I am back on this PC despite the masses of work from my AS courses and am trying my best to hear the loving words of you guys out there._

_Now that that is out of the way, I send out massive thanks to all of my reviewers on the last update: __**P-Artsypants**__, __**Ayame4679**__, __**Malik The Night Angel**__, __**umdiddle**__, __**Dragonbow117**__, the guest who reviewed under __**'Jo'**__, the guest who reviewed simply as __**'person'**__, __**Arcawolf **__and an especially gigantic mass of gratitude to __**Lord Jaric**__, the one who reviewed all three chapters despite me being up to chapter four now. Thank you all for the support, especially now with me being held up on writing thanks to school, it seriously means so much!_

The chapter following this notice (that will be finished soon, I promise you) is definitely my most favourite so far, despite it being shorter than the previous ones... and you are all going to understand why. This chapter will be an entire Viking chapter; no 'focusing' per sae on the assassins in anyway (Zylum will be mentioned a few times though). We will be focusing mainly on Astrid, as she is going to be a big part of this Hiccup-assassin scenario so I want to give her some of the lime light. In this update, she is going to be sticking herself firmly into her position of where she stands... and I reckon you are all going to be happy where it ends up.

This chapter... will be for the shippers. Live long, Hiccstrid.)

End
file.